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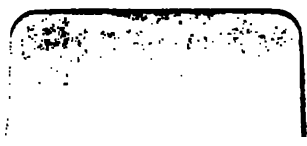
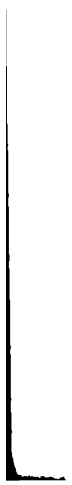
LOVE'S PURPLE

S. ELLA WOOD DEAN





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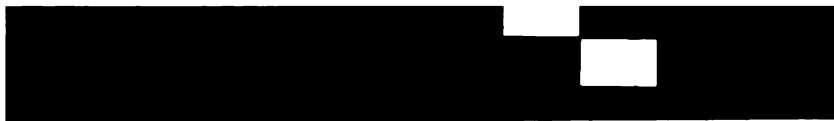


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LOVE'S PURPLE



LOVE'S PURPLE

BY

S. ELLA WOOD DEAN



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PROLOGUE

"Nature comes eating, and drinking, and sinning."

— Emerson.

THE world, when it remarks upon me at all, says that at my feet it has laid the brightest promise, the sweetest hope; and adds that, if she would save herself from reproach, no woman should be unmindful of all these favors. How flippantly we give our decree of what others should enjoy! No one ever gave a woman credit for suffering; nor of being able to laugh when she was expected to cry.

Mrs. Grundy said, when I was a maid, "Kate Granley is morbid"; as a matron I am "hors de combat." My life has been a jumble,—nothing has been coherent. The last milestone of regret has been passed as, near the journey's end, the realization comes to me that the signposts were mostly written upon in unintelligible characters. The uselessness of everything in life is its greatest tragedy.

The *emptiness* of the wide space that was prophesied should be resplendent with my large and wonderful personality and fame is pathetic, as are most

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failures. My life has been built on hope. We know what a house of cards that is to inhabit. The sands of the sea in number and stability are as my ideals were.

Yet, we never know what good may come out of evil. Seeing the slime we would not guess the lily without a previous experience. Happy women, like peaceful nations, have never made history. A du Barry lives in satin, amid roses and love, to die scrawling her messages of misery, upon pages already blotted with tears and soiled with court scandal, in ink that will never fade.

"The music of the moon sleeps in the plain egg of the nightingale."

If we show signs of a too austere morality we are insulted by the cynical sneer of fashion. We prefer the tinsel and glare of shoddy palaces, the sparkle of diamonds, and the rustle of silks, to the hut, the calico dress, and Brook Farm philosophy. The paths between the two are devious. Our neighbors are the keepers of our little souls.

When very young we have illusions, a white conscience, and paint even black. As we grow older we hear commercial men say, "honesty is the best policy." This phrase loses its double entendre as we actually experience what temptations men have to be honest. There are many such bib and tucker axioms that cover up the bare diplomacy of most of our dealings,



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as we grow wise with years, to show to our proud souls that our self-esteem is assured if our neighbors approve of our conduct.

Civilization has so denatured us by its inane etiquette that, like other hybrids out of their element, we adapt ourselves to circumstances. Our effete culture brings us to its own standard, which, vulgar as it is, has its advantages to many, over the primitive state of single blessedness.



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CHAPTER I

*"The flesh doth thrill
And has connection by some unseen chain
With its original source, kindred and substance."*

IF we choose our parents wisely, and profit by their teaching, our future happiness is assured. This ground-plan of life seems (and in a novel is) easy of fulfillment, but it is as rare of accomplishment as most of the other things for which we plan.

In a tiny cottage, in a small village of New England, there lived two foolish people, from whose kiss of passion emanated a little being whose name was Kate Granley. I lay nestling in the cradle while my mother buckled my father's sword upon him. She bade him go from this Eden of love to fight for his country, bleeding as it was from the wounds of civil war.

Above my cradle hung the colors of the flag. I came into the world to the sound of cannon; the

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echo of a distant war song was my lullaby, and my mother's lips anxiously whispered prayers for my father's safety.

Renown for precocity in singing and speaking came to me when my fat, chubby feet toddled into their third year. Admiring friends taught me at a tender age to appreciate applause. My favorite ballad was :

“ Little drops of water,
Little grains of sand,
Make the mighty ocean
And the beauteous land.

Little words of kindness,
Little deeds of love,
Make this world an Eden
Like the Heaven above.”

The crossroad which separates a simple home life from the world, came when I was three years old, or younger. The world heard with rapturous astonishment of a journey of six hundred miles made by myself alone, without damage of any kind. An inquiry of the train conductor as to the whereabouts of my satchel at the termination of the journey, added éclat to my growing fame. From the start I was made to feel that a great, golden opportunity was given me to shape my destiny into something transcendent and extraordinary. As I approached womanhood the



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wild praise of these two worshipful people was not diminished by my obstinacy, which provoked many severe rebukes.

I remember when first my beauty was in question. Secretly I did not admire myself. I would often sit before the glass painting my *café-au-lait* complexion with ripe strawberries and white flour. My nose turned the wrong way and flared horribly at the nostrils. Instead of the beautiful black hair, like that of the young mother, I had nondescript locks of mixed yellows and browns. Once my French governess put my hair on top of my head saying, "*Ainsi pour voir.*" That she dilated upon the superiority of a homely woman with amiable qualities, over the contentious beauty, I mused, was either because *Mademoiselle* was not a success as a hairdresser, or that the prognostics for my future belle-ship were faint. But talent and pretty clothes count for more than beauty. Was it not so in the court of France, where plain women lived their whole lives in successful amours?

I was not beautiful, but the marks of a thoroughbred animal were apparent in my physique. Soulful eyes, fine skin, and lovely teeth formed the physical basis for a reputation throughout the two continents that I reserved for my triumphs. There were no bounds to an egotism that did not hesitate to delight in an admiration of my lips, "red as a pomegranate," that "breathed of love," that in men aroused the de-



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sire of a never failing avowal of love. Reporters of local newspapers puffed me as a rival of Adelina Patti; I did not doubt them. My wit, good nature, and "savoir faire" passed for a brilliancy that gained prestige for me everywhere.

Men made of me a fellow Greek. It was not possible for me to assume the "non compos mentis" qualities that make child-like women so charming in men's eyes, but it did not surprise me that most men found me strangely new and fetching. It was neither beauty, brains nor loveliness that went to make up this power by which those about me were induced to do my bidding, but it was a commingling of these with a diablerie of something essentially my own, that no other girl of my age possessed, or, at least, exhibited. The violence of men's passion for me was mostly measured by its brevity. My vanity sometimes stopped to wonder at this.

To shape my own destiny became my ambition before the era of long skirts; and the best things I have known have been those I have myself induced. A self-won victory is the best one, yet for every prize in life a forfeit is demanded. I was not comprehensible to my associates. They made me conscious of an isolation that was not agreeable to vanity, though my personality won for me a social position. A youth once said: "You have a drag with the swell set that makes me proud of you. As you entertained



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last night, your affair might have been chronicled with the Vanderbilts. I like to see your name bracketed with the best and richest of the earth. Your party has made everything else on the calendar this season appear tame."

My wit was often barbed. My elders laughed, and my victims, too, even the very enemies I made. I was of this oblivious; for I loved myself, physically, mentally and morally. In the dreamed of future everyone would see what a great somebody I would be, but for the present I did not care even to try.

Old men were fond of me for what I promised to be. In a sincerely poetical way my physical beauty, fresh and sparkling, appealed to them as would that of a rose, or a star. There was a slackening of the tight rein of this egotism occasionally but my faith in my power was limitless, which amounts to hope, and is enthusiasm.

From my father I inherited pride, with strong impulses that often led me into foolish perversions of self-interest. Beyond the voluptuous needs of my easy disposition for luxury, to which I was tenderly inclined to yield, the vulgar never led me from the prescribed path of my high ideals and aspiration for truth, but a greedy, ambitious egotism taught me the art of selfishness which, while my youth lasted, many thought to be charming. For many years my philosophy was a soft dough which I



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kneaded to all emergencies to suit the many needs of this vanity.

At sixteen, well-fed and happy, I wrote to a friend that the only real happiness is to be found in the quiet, contented, Christian home where all are bound by affection — the perfect, ideal love, which is never attained elsewhere this side of Heaven. This goes to show the double dealing we can have with ourselves as we say words that do not voice our real ideas. My clairvoyant vision could not be blinded to this fatal contradiction in the dreams of my own future. These were of a glorious fanfare; my path strewn with roses, a crown upon my head, the world admiringly envious of me; and then, love! love supreme, would be the motive of life's harmony. By love, I thought of whole days spent in its elemental expression by the side of some handsome man with much leisure time. A guess is often a prediction,— a woman's whole life is colored by her first love affair.

I waver now at the ford of the Rubicon of Youth — that swift flowing river. My moral strength, for which I am still remarked, is partly assumed. It is the result of long continued subjection of the emotions, the effort to eliminate an excess of expression. I am now almost unsexed into an absolute indifference that most women would term Hades.

There are bodies without souls, and there are also women whose spirits are almost unconscious of their

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bodies. Endowed congenitally with an ivory nature that could not gather dust, it is difficult for me even now, after a wide experience, to live up to the hypocritical lives of the women whom the best society obliges one to know.

Virtuous by intuition; frivolous by impulse, my history accords with that generally written by the heart. Is not that always a mystery?

The world attributes gossip to women;—certain it is that few women owe their progress to their own sex. Women rarely understand, and still more rarely bestow a disinterested love upon each other.

Everything not money nowadays is appanage. Everything has, or has not, a market value. Nothing is sacred. A Delilah-doxy chants new measures to the tune of chinking gold. While we are young we make love; live for others; talk of ideals; read poetry; wear white; pray to Heaven; believe in God; trust in men; retain our virtue; die for honor; marry to keep holy the sacred bond of matrimony.

The new philosophy teaches us that women have equal rights with men. There is no love, nothing save self-interest; there are no heights of faith, only level plains of agnosticism and science.

Yet, what are the true philosophy and rules of life? One woman devotes herself to the man of her choice, refuses herself to others. Such a woman, if she has a kind heart, and is born with the natural

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grace of God, who has a divine magnetism, and has never lacked the male of her choice, has probably lived the satisfied life of wife and mother. How can she comprehend the woman who may crave the completeness of another's life, yet denies herself and worships at her own shrine; who would not give birth to children because she fears the transient deformity, and feels that these children would destroy her life without merit, and who on her wedding day, a young girl, concludes a dupe's bargain?

Some sort of love story generally prefaces each life, however, before it enters upon this real desert journey where the hot sun above and the waste of sand below sear and burn each vestige of sentiment from the heart with the thirst created by a first disappointment.

At middle age a woman must be shod to travel into the great loveless, limitless beyond. We are told to shun an exhibition of emotion, to forget all the Empyrean past, and scatter its violet shadows from the door of our withered hearts. Let us not look at the stars lest we fall into a pit, nor call upon God lest we forget ourselves.

After graduating from school with distinction, at seventeen, I dreamed away the summer in a languorous listlessness, but not without suffering the exquisite pain of affection and longing of the sex nature for a response, which is to human nature what the

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sun is to plant life,—an awakening of the everlasting worth in us into being.

Watching the moon, reading poetry, studying George Eliot, were interspersed with many humdrum duties of the household. Many were the tongues which gossiped as to my intention of marrying. I did not deign to offer suggestions, but in my heart I resolved that I could not be satisfied with the grubbing, club-lived man and his list of vices. I said to myself, the man who calls me "wife" shall not be animal; he shall be white-souled and pure-hearted. His Holy Grail shall be guarded on the sacred altar of his manhood. He will not stoop to do a meanness, he shall not be dominated by greed, and he will love me nobly, sweetly as a woman loves. I, too, shall be made anew, for he will reveal my other self to me. We shall live in a perfect fragrance exhaled from a purest joy.

Moonshine that wanes; rose leaves that fade; love that dies — those were not of my dreams. Someone has said that what we are is always attracted to us — that we always deserve our fate because we have the elements within us that go toward making the result. What were my dreams? Reality? Or did there live reality aside from me? At any rate, I thought my destiny lay in my own hand, that I should shape and instill it with the fragrance of a perfect happiness.

CHAPTER II

*"And we are happy, very,
He and I,
Aye, even glad and merry."*

"DEAR KATE:
"Be ready by four o'clock to ride with me and another old man. We will be prompt. Don't keep us waiting.

"Sincerely,

"YOUR UNCLE LAURENCE"

Adhering to the rules of romance a young man should appear in the first chapter of a story; here he comes riding into the second. My horsemanship never brought a blush except of pride to my cheek. It was my joy to enter the field of conquest on a pony's back. I was full of youthful eagerness, and the hour was very long in coming. At last, my uncle and his friend, Mr. Starwell, made their appearance.

The men did not hide their pleasure at seeing me so keen for the sport. The stranger did not come

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up to my expectations. He would never incite an inspiration from which to evolve an heroic. He had a shining, white face that gave a harsh idea as of too much soap and water. His plain drab clothes gave an immediate impression of an economical person, prejudiced against daintiness. He might be said to resemble a pearl set in lead. High cheek bones and a large aquiline nose redeemed the face with its pale gray eyes and nondescript moustache, closely cropped. He possessed a self-poise which one could almost describe as commanding. He boasted, and sincerely thought, that he had never known defeat, and considered that his life's battles had been won by himself alone.

A new man in a young girl's life is as a strange continent to the explorer. There came to me a fleeting, instinctive fear, or perhaps a hope, that this person would weave an important thread in the warp or woof of my life's fabric. I guessed it as the low tones of his voice subdued me to an unselfish attention; the glances of his eyes held me placidly content while he studied me, and the clasp of the large, square hand thrilled me as nothing before in my short experience had done. His interested, close survey lost me my coveted aplomb, and I sprang nervously into the saddle, giving my horse the rein. My long braids were soon floating to the breeze like pennants, as I flew along, the men following in hot



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pursuit. They were the first to call a halt to allow the horses to regain their wind.

"You ride like an Indian maid." This speech of bold admiration smacked of old-fashioned gallantry, — something not expected of him — but it might not be surprising from a man who observed the conventionalities of society no more than to ride in his business suit.

Every detail of that ride upon the Seventeenth of September, stands out as clear as if it had happened yesterday. The sunshine, the cool air in our faces, the autumn leaves in our path, the clean earth-smells, and, the exhilaration of this new experience of a man — a well-known man of the world — admiring me, for his eyes looked at me in a way that sent the hot blood to my cheeks.

To make this admiration sure I let my pony take a high fence into a vegetable patch at the side of the road, and then stood laughing, at my new admirer as he fumbled with the gate, while the care-taker, an old German, screamed execrations on my head.

"O! Father Time," I cried gayly, "we came to admire your beautiful garden. May we not buy some of these fine flowers?"

This appeased the old German, and he gave us flowers, urged us to come often, and waved us "auf wiedersehen" in a lusty voice quite different in its tones from those with which he had greeted us.



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As we went out of the garden my cavalier said: "I never like to do anything by halves, we will close the gate to make assurance doubly sure." As he said this he laid his eyes upon mine silently and sent a love pact to me in that glance which was to my heart a call such as had never come to it before.

The sun was burning fiery holes in the fluffy blue and white of the sky as it slowly sank behind the horizon in a gorgeously royal array of crimson and gold. As we watched its shifting beauties we remained oblivious of all else until the varied colors settled into the blood red of a dying day. Suddenly it came to me that we were a long way from home and that the sun was already down, and I said, "We must return, it is getting late and they will worry," for my uncle had turned back. "Yes," said Mr. Starwell, "if I had a daughter she should never be allowed out alone, she would be so precious to me."

Most men are elemental in their natures and this man was as the others,—a real disappointment to me. He was a prig, unfortunately. His remark showed that he had not yet opened his shell to reach out in the wide field of independent thought, and I felt lonesome and disgusted as we rode rapidly back.

In silence I dismounted and watched my delighted pony kick her white hoofs into the air as evidence of joy at her near approach to the oat bin. I envied her the brute independence of thought and con-

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ventionality. As I stood thus, waiting for Mr. Starwell to speak, our eyes met in a direct, steady gaze from which I was unable to withdraw. He seemed amused. Now, when things are plain to me, I can see that he was wondering if anyone could really be so naïve, for he had been accustomed to the attention of leisurely and influential women of the world.

As he dropped from the saddle, after remounting to go away, he stretched out his hand to say good-bye and said: "It would give me pleasure to call, or perhaps you would like to go to the theatre with me. I shall be free any evening convenient to you."

I hesitated a moment and then said, "Would Thursday suit you?"

"Yes," he replied, "I will come early Thursday evening."

While not looking at him I felt his insistent eyes were impelling me and I dared to look at him long and steadily. Then nervously flecking the dust and foam from my habit, I turned to enter the house, intending to convey the impression that this attention was neither new, nor particularly flattering to me.

The twilight was fading fast. He passed out into the dusk; and I watched him along the white road till his form faded from view.

CHAPTER III

*"Lost to the world in which I take no part,
I sit alone and listen to my heart.
Pleased with my little corner of the earth,
Glad that I came,—not sorry to depart."*

PREPARATIONS had been made for me to go to college, but at the time set for departure my mother was taken ill with a most malignant fever, and as my devotion to her was an unconquerable passion, I determined to sacrifice for her the college year.

No mother was ever born with surer maternal instincts than was mine. Women reared in satin, fed on terrapin and champagne; who have dictated to French nurses, and principally decided all things for their own comfort; who crave admiration and have small-tart ideas regarding the world outside their gilded cage and circle, and whose children believe that their clothes are more important than their souls, are not as my mother was. Thank Heaven, she was not of this class.

Her innocence and simple, child-like nature would



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have been incomprehensible to the average society woman. Certainly, they would never know how to be so self-sacrificing, generous, kind and loving. An early training of most severe simplicity and unwearying gentleness had had their effect, and made of her the angel of mercy that her household knew. The bird was ever singing in her heart and, never having seen the great outside world, her unbounded love for her husband and child made of them her world, her means of grace, and hope of glory. Her exotic mind made of her husband a golden god with a clay shell. He often twisted and contorted her fair soul until it shrieked with pain, but she would smile up at him with tears streaming from her beautiful eyes, her curved lips trembling, while she tried to hide from him her unspeakable sadness.

There was a short period of my girlhood when I remembered my mother as having been young. The glad ring of her laughter and brightness of her nature made the house happy. At that time her hair was blue black, and her skin, soft as satin, had the rich coloring of the Italian, with a faint glow in her lovely cheek that seemed to emanate from her smile, as when the light of a candle shines through ivory. The regular features, petite, lovely form, tolerant mind, and active intelligence brought all natures to her gentle heart. Old and young loved her, as her



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depth of sympathy, knowledge of suffering, or her light merriment appealed to each in his need. She was not a woman easily forgotten. Her benignity was royal in its generous scope. This was changed by some miracle, instantly.

One morning she came downstairs with gray hair, a haggard, sallow face, and eyes — such eyes, shall I ever forget their expression! As a shaded brook in the sunshine reflects all the joyous brightness of the miniature world about it, so my mother's eyes, — neither blue nor gray, brown nor gold, were the comingling of all these as the various emotions were reflected and brought out in them, the crystalline windows of her pure soul. To-day glazed, empty, with all the life gone out of them, as a light snuffed out — these lifeless, steely-gray eyes looked without seeing, and wept without a tear. What could have so utterly felled the spirit in my mother's eyes?

"Mamma!" I cried, as frantically I clutched her dress. But she stood motionless and without a word. I did not go to school that day. Without knowing why, I wandered aimlessly about the house, once in a while trying to speak or attract my poor little mother's attention and draw her out of this dreadful lethargy.

From this time on our lives were different. There were no more songs in the twilight, no more caresses,



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sweet nothings or stupid jokes. Even the ordinary civilities were omitted from my father's and mother's intercourse.

For five years this pall, with almost insupportable persistency, threw its evil effect upon our once joyous home. The misery of this cankerworm made ravages in my mother's beauty and dulled her mind. She grew paler and more emaciated and now took no part in the welfare of her neighbors or friends, paying no visits and receiving no calls, and never going to theatre, opera or church. In a measure she found a certain relief for her mental agony in darning and mending old clothes, or knitting. She never sat idle but forlornly took part in the affairs of the household, sometimes sadly humming a mournful refrain as she did her work. Nothing broke the dull gray of this colorless monotony. There was nothing bright, joyous or glad, no pretty clothes. The house was devoid of beauty, not even a flower in a vase to make us think there was anything in the world but this — this — What was it?

During these five years my father was rarely seen by the family. He ate an early breakfast, and came from business only to change his clothes and go out for the evening, rarely returning till late. My idea of married life was always more or less salted down into this one derived from our own home life.

My mother's illnesses became more frequent and

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it was a marvel to the medical profession how she survived many of her attacks of pain and fever. For some reason, which she never divulged, she insisted on not having a trained nurse, so I learned early in life to tenderly care for her. The pale and haggard face, and meagre, gray hair, restlessly tossed about and pulled by the thin tiny hands, made a picture to excite anyone's sympathy, especially one who knew of her patient resignation, and that she had always thought of others and their comfort first, regardless of her own.

Once, after lying in a torpid stupor for three days, she seemed to rally. Her will was weak, her eyelids too heavy to open as she struggled to say, "Daughter, I am dying. Go, ask grandfather to pray for me."

Trembling with the first agony of my life, and beside myself with grief I caught up the frail little body in my arms, crying, "Mother, Mother, you must not die, you must live!"

She had expended her strength in the few words she had uttered but with appealing decision she tried to draw the thin lips into a smile, as though she appreciated the futility of everything, and, still hoping, I tenderly laid her back on the bed and rushed in haste to seek grandfather.

My grandfather belonged to a race of men bred to prefer exile or ignominy for the sake of right rather



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than the cringing honor of the world with a smirch on the family name. He was a man of indomitable will and untarnished escutcheon. Above his great height his calm face showed by its expression that peace of mind a Christian heart had illumined through years of civil war, strenuous professional life, and, finally, a well earned retirement to enjoy his declining years.

He made his home with us at this time, and I soon brought him to my mother's room. As he approached the bedside he laid his large hand over her tiny one as he asked: "Did you want me, Susanna?"

"Yes, Father, pray for me."

He had been a renowned physician of good repute in diagnosis and I looked to him for an opinion as to her real condition.

His answer was: "The candle is all but burnt out. The light of the spirit will not last long."

To this gentle, flower-like woman who had only acted for the good of those about her, the true, long suffering, deep-loving heart that knew so little of joy on earth, perhaps death would bring the peace or happiness she so richly deserved; for even a happy childhood had been denied her, as she had even suffered abuse from a harsh step-mother, of inferior origin and grasping nature.

The theory that death is the Christian's crown of eternal joy is well enough to sing about in church

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on Sunday, I thought, but the coming of the final test of having your own loved ones called hence by the dread messenger is another thing.

Would it be best for her to die? Even so, the loss of her forever struck me as so deplorably desolate that with grief unrestrained, I fell across her bed, crying, in a paroxysm impossible to control, "Grandfather, pray, pray for her to live."

Then his low, calm voice said: "O God, look down with compassion on this poor mortal body. Save this soul to everlasting salvation for righteousness. If it be Thy will save her to her family, but if this corruption shall put on incorruption, save her through eternity, for Christ's sake. Amen."

The scene in which he was taking part seemed to leave him unmoved. "Do you feel prepared to die?" he asked, only interested in her future state. If ever anyone worked their passage through to heaven in this life my mother did so by her unflinching devotion to duty.

"Yes," she murmured very low. Then she groped for me. "Be good — Dear — Tell Papa — good-bye."

I barely heard these words but they seemed to exhaust all the strength she possessed and she lay quiet, but breathing.

My father entered, smoking a fragrant cigar, and apparently in a particularly good humor.

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To my whispered explanation that mother was dying he said, with a gesture he usually employed when he handed me twice the amount of money I had asked for, "Oh, no, your mother will get well," and with this he went to the library to finish his cigar and to read the evening paper, while I went to my dark, little room.

It has always seemed to me that the elements have done much to accentuate my misery in all the sad crises of my life. To-night a storm of rain and wind beat and whistled and roared, accompanied by great claps of thunder that shook the house, followed by chain on chain of lightning that forked frantically across a sky full of scurrying, heavy clouds. The great elm trees beside the house swayed like reeds and the wind played a gamut of weird music through their leaves, when suddenly the tallest elm of the group was riven in two by lightning.

To my superstitious mind this storm with its dreadful results seemed to presage some awful catastrophe. I had just knelt at the foot of my bed to pray, under stress of emotion new to me, when a maid knocked at the door.

I opened it and she said, "A gentleman, Miss, a Mr. Starwell, who says he was delayed on account of the storm. He is sorry to be so late getting here but would you please see him?"

CHAPTER IV

"And the two ants who are asking of each other at the turn of that little ants' foot-worn path through the moss, 'Lor via, elor fortuna,' and the builders, also, who built yonder pile of cloud marble in the West, and the gilder who gilded it are gone down behind it."— Ruskin.

IT was ten o'clock. I looked in on my mother, who had fallen asleep. The crisis had passed and the doctor considering his patient out of danger had gone.

Even in my exaggerated grief the natural appetency that longed for satisfaction had recourse to the usual methods known to coquettes. In a particularly becoming white gown of quorn cloth I determined that this opportunity of making an effect on Mr. Starwell should not be lost. I felt assured that if he saw me now, dressed in this way, and with this new expression in my face, I would have nothing to fear. Love equalizes all men, and he would be made to kneel in abject submission. Conquest, with the spoils of war, should be mine. Any penalty that might attach to this success was not at that time apparent.

As I entered the room I watched for what I had



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striven, and his ill concealed admiration of me was my reward for coming down. As we clasped hands he held mine as if he did not want to break a spell that our constant thought of each other since we met had cast over us. He was struck with my mature manner, assumed for the nonce — the new something that adorns a face where sorrow has been written, entirely deceived him.

He returned my straight, quiet gaze with a sympathetic glance that was out of keeping with his cold, white face; for he appeared to have a soap-washed, flint nature which, under the right conditions, strands a poetical egotism like mine in a helpless wreck.

It looked as though it would be an equal battle, and I quickly decided to hold my own, so instead of the kittenish manner that I had employed the first day we met, I fell into the rôle of a woman with the new luxury of a sadness upon her. This cue would be taken up in order that I might give him an intellectual exhibition. I quoted indiscriminately, and felt sure he was impressed with my powerful mind and scintillating genius. I explained what I intended to do, and what I would become in the future.

This play was all the more necessary as a means of fascination because the parlor we sat in was the embodiment of ugliness, with its gray, painted walls that in shiny hardness absorbed all light. Then there was also an entire lack of ornament. No accessories

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of any kind to delight one; no cozy corner, pretty pictures, dainty bric-a-brac, suggesting elegance; no bright color, or any hint to imbue life with anything except bare necessities. All this lack was made doubly impressive by two long mirrors which repeated and accentuated the forlorn emptiness.

So I led Mr. Starwell to talk of many of the glorified truths most dear to me with a solemn manner, as of a confidant who shares a secret, which was sure to flatter him. At an early age a woman learns that a man is most entertained when he may talk to her of himself.

With a brain full of oriental imagery, I did not miss the actual things that society women depend upon to make their intercourse more attractive. My mind's scenario supplied everything to me that pocketbook or circumstances had denied me.

That his interest in me was paramount to every other consideration was a strong lever that I feared would raise my victory over him into, perhaps, a love for him. This was to be guarded against. I did not know that to fight love is to add new legions to its militant force, and that it "grows by what it feeds on."

No one will ever ride a hobby horse to death. A man will strive to hide his quixotism, while he will never disguise a boldness that is only weakness, or be able to conceal the fact that his armor is only tin;

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nor deceive anyone into applauding a mission performed out of cheap self-approval, when he is making love to a calculating woman.

A great point had been gained in reading this man's character, by learning what sort of a woman he thought would make a good wife. No one ever marries the sort of person that he pictures to himself he will, but it is a moral certainty that we are aptly judged according to what we think is virtue in others.

At the end of his short call Mr. Starwell gave me credit for an angelic genuineness, and put a halo on my head that did not bring a blush to my cheek, for the deception only delighted me.

As I prepared to go to bed I wondered if he would ever be any more amusing than he had been to-night, or if he would always be the same prosaic, sensible fellow; if he would take me to the opera, and how many roses he would send me a week, and, most important of all, what would I answer to him when he proposed, which, with his cold-blooded nature, he could not well be moved to do except by tactics known principally to tragic queens.

Generally speaking Mr. Starwell belonged to the type of man who marries a well-bred woman of good family and certain fortune and settles down in a neatly furnished house, in order to bring up a family of well-behaved children, and die with the "principal citizens" for pallbearers, leaving behind him a good



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name, a large fortune, and a widow not beyond the possibilities of consolation. In one particular he would find in me a checkmate, for the flood-tide of my being held a strong undertow against such commonplaces as stereotyped love-making, child-bearing, or the humdrum of domestic life.

Mr. Starwell would make a prologue to the coming drama, when a real man would appear, who could speak to me across far waters; a man with whose soul mine would have mutual, instantaneous communication; for I knew, I felt his existence. My being responded to the thrill of his, but it was "not yet to be"—We might not meet till after long, dark years of nights and worlds of misery had been passed, but we would meet some time; of that I had a satisfied conviction.

CHAPTER V.

*"After you left, our lovely room
Seemed like a casket whence the soul had fled.
I stood in awful and appalling gloom,
The world seemed empty, and all joy seemed dead."*

THE tired little body of my sainted mother became by her prolonged fever a complete wreck. Her busy hands now lay idle in her lap, her large, hungering eyes stared vacantly after me, and her thin, blue lips never curved into the lovely smile that used to be the cheer of many a sad heart. Than to see her thus it would have been better she had died. The almost insupportable loneliness of separation by death that we struggle so hard against when the call comes, is not, as we then think, the most difficult thing to bear.

Mr. Starwell, with his constant attentions, put a certain balm on this wound, for the assiduous devotion of a lover can do much toward relieving the grief of a young girl when her mind and heart are just awakening to the new sensation of love. So for three

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long months he monopolized me, until his letters and flowers were becoming daily necessities.

My relatives began to make arrangements for our wedding by discussing what they would wear, and what presents they would give me. In their certainty they turned a deaf ear to my denials and began to consider Mr. Starwell in connection with my future.

"All very well," they said, "but when a man with a nose like that of Mr. Starwell starts to do a thing nothing short of demise will prevent him from accomplishing his purpose."

"Yes, in any other but a love affair that might be true," I replied, "but no one can marry me against my will. Abduction is not in fashion and Mr. Starwell is not an Arab of the desert but an ordinary citizen. He will ask me to marry him and I shall refuse, or put off the marriage for several years until I can get my bearings, or see someone else whom I like better; but if not, and there is no other way, then I will marry him."

One aunt seemed to be the Job of this philosophy as she shook her head, pursed her lips into a hard knot, and said, slowly but convincingly, as a referee sure of his ground, and who should not be doubted: "You count without your host. You will do pretty nearly as he says, and he has determined to marry you."

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After this felling blow to my pride, in my self-assurance, I staggered to my feet, as it were, to see that he was dominating me beyond my previous perception of the fact. Even the grief for my mother's condition was lost in the quiet satisfaction that his mere presence gave me.

While each day dawned with a promise to myself that this predominance would not last long, still every other interest in life would daily fall, obliterated in this quicksand. Was it love that filled the earth clear to the very edge of the rosy horizon of an endless future?

One day my father demanded as his paternal right to hear the truth about a subject with which all of his friends seemed to be better acquainted than he. His ears were regaled with the following:

"Of course, I shall not marry Mr. Starwell until I am twenty-four, or five, years old. That will give me plenty of time to be tied to a man for the rest of my days. I believe that after one has taken some enjoyment in life it is time enough to consent to that yokedom. Without ever having traveled, seen the world or met people, never to be able to accomplish anything but just to give myself up to the commonplace duty of being a slave to a man, and a mother to his children, is not a prospect to which I look forward. To be a renowned actress or singer, a novelist, or only to be known as the best whip in the

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country, would be accomplishing something but to take a man's name to be a 'thing' merely, dependent on his bounty, or greed, is more than any of my ancestors have given me courage for. In short, I must *be somebody*."

There was a silence, in which father remembered his own youth with its dreams. He recrossed his legs, and with a readjustment of his glasses said: "If that is the way you think, I am sorry, for a woman ought to find her full satisfaction in making her home a heaven on earth for her family. By that means she at least has a little joy that she may not be so cocksure of otherwise."

We talked for hours. He tried to demonstrate how love should be the only motive for marrying, yet, how wise a thing it would be for me to provide myself with a rich husband.

While this was a new note to my mind, it was of no particular importance that money should play any part in this question. The sweetest of all things, I fancied, was liberty. Just then life was "en rapport" with everything good or worth while.

It seemed a fine thing to show to the world the flattering spectacle of the "catch of the season" bending the knee to pigtails and a country experience. The beginning was promising; what would be the grand, noisy finale?

So youth with its rosy cheeks, a small repertoire



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of French songs, and a sublime egotism descried the future success beyond all bounds.

The "eligible party" of the season had not been beguiled by the smiling, scheming mammas who were in pursuit of him for their hothouse buds, the conventional species to which Mr. Starwell was accustomed. Instead, he had pursued me, of his own accord, a young girl without a label or market price; sans cicerone, sans chaperon.

He explained one day, full of candor as he always was, that I was a delicious experience to him because he found in me a rare type whose originality surprised and entertained him. Brought up by a widowed mother, he had lived his childhood in a cottage home, covered by honeysuckle vines, with the cool ocean breezes wafting the salt-sea smells to his cheeks and nostrils. Now, with his tired city nerves, he loved to think of those sweet but hard-working days, and the reveries gave a fresh renewal of life that put new ideas and better thoughts into his brain. With this picture in mind he imagined me to be the chief inspiration.

While he never, during our whole courtship, passed the sacred bounds prescribed by strictest propriety, yet, from the first his manner bespoke a sincere, passionate love, too complex for my understanding. It rather awed than awakened a similar passion within me. The tone of his voice, his whole attitude was



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particular towards me. I was bound up in my own egotism, lately hatched to a new day in a new world — I longed for nothing. It was enough. There is nothing truer than the axiom that at twenty we want a lover, but at forty we want love.

Guilt often opens our eyes to love. World-weary, satisfied travelers, we are brought face to face with it toward the end of life.

It was impossible for a weakling like me, suddenly coming into this rainbow circle, to be indifferent to him or to escape his influence, nor did I really wish to try, though why I could not tell. Still, with the best tactics known in my meagre code, I kept him from talking of love; for to talk about love is one method of making love, as we cover from view the live wire by a silken thread.

One night while driving home from the opera in a carriage, he put my opera cloak close about me, as he said: "I like you best in your white robes, my queen, my lily." Then, raising the lace scarf from off my forehead he looked at me long, as one who thirsts will look at a running brook of cold water. He searched for his message — he thought he read his answer, for breathing in my ear he said: "Do not look at me so, darling, you will destroy me; not now, not now."

As I saw how his passion was eating into his soul, guilt made me afraid, for he wanted my love. There



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was only the cold glare of my innocence to give; while he was completely conquered by his passion for me.

My nature was built, and still remained on the cool, everyday plane of ambition, and I asked myself, "Could he say these same words in exactly the same way if he were to come to see me in the morning dusting the parlor, or washing the dishes?" And some dread devil whispered to me that by a strange alchemy known only to the initiated, the rose of love could be killed root and branch by that ceremony called marriage.



CHAPTER VI

*"Besides, incentives come from the soul's self,
The rest avail not. Why do I need you?"*

AT last it had come. Mr. Starwell demanded, by right of three months' assiduous attention, to be heard. Hints or suggestions had no effect. He would like to see me Thursday evening.

Looking forward to the great event when a man should propose to me I returned home early from a dinner with old friends to find him and my father talking together, and while leisurely taking off my things I noted the difference between the two men.

Through all my life my father's high esteem had been sufficient reward. It seemed best, according to his view, for me to marry this man; we would see, perhaps a compromise of some sort might be made.

The contrast between my father and Mr. Starwell was startlingly great. My father had a sentimental nature, was an idealist; poetic as a youth who had breathed his first fancy to the stars; always ready to meet the difficulties in his way with light wit and banter, and with that sanguine temperament that

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paints all things in a rosy hue. Heroically tall, handsome, with that muscular, shapely strength that few men retain after their lusty youth has passed; with an artistic sense, finely sensitive; a great heart, generous beyond all reason; and without too much respect for his own hard-earned money, he had a strong inclination to especially favor the gentle sex, which was an attitude entirely alluring to all women except his own wife. Unmethodical, he trusted to a watchful Providence for the honesty and good treatment which he seldom received. He would rather talk about the beauty of nature, the songs of birds, or a pretty woman's ankle, than stocks and bonds, the condition of trade or the price of potatoes, so that men, with a look of disgusted boredom, generally left him to talk to the women, whom he flattered to a nicety, while he quoted poetry.

The large aquiline nose of Mr. Starwell, as my aunt had said, was the feature by which one was most inclined to judge him, while his keen, quick eyes, narrow, small mouth, thin cheeks and high forehead were not false indications of a commercial, practical spirit, trained from an adamant bed-rock of Yankee origin. His hard, staccato tones, tuned to a low pitch, were of the dried, business-integrity quality that could calmly tell an errand boy whom he was discharging for whistling that "he only wasted time and energy in such operatic feats that were better



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indulged in after business hours." There was not a trace of that liquid quality in his voice that seems to accord with a penchant for illicit amours, or a sudden plunge into a fascinating indiscretion, which I had watched for but never once heard. More than one man's fate in my life, has depended upon the timbre of his voice as I heard it speaking in casual tones to another person.

Carefully he helped me to take off my wraps, while he looked at me very much as he might examine a new grade of cloth presented for his decision as to its market value. Withdrawing from the room my father left the field clear.

As a Buddhist approaches his idol to worship, with the incense in his hand, so Mr. Starwell quietly approached me, took a paper from his pocket, looked at the clock in a "just time to catch the train" kind of way, and then began to read a paper which purported to be a proposal for my hand and heart.

Recovering from the first surprise of this method of avowal I heard him say: "Your sweet gentleness has completely won my heart. Your lovely character and fine mind would be the foundation of a happiness that it would be my life's effort to make complete, should you become my wife. Nothing in the world seems worth living for if you refuse me. Ever since I rode beside you on that memorable day I have felt the difference it makes when you are not



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by my side. My heart would be empty if you went from me, for you completely fill it."

From this short passage he went on at length to give me the figures of his financial condition, all of which was incomprehensible to me, for I knew nothing of finance or business and therefore could take no interest in the amounts he had so carefully checked up, but my conclusion was that he must be a very rich man.

He looked at me for a response. Never before had I felt so hopeless and young, it was so different from what any young girl might have expected. It seemed to my untutored experience that a man and woman clasped in each other's arms, with whispered words hushed by a kiss, was the lover's holy way of sealing such a compact, and that hearts spoke such truths to each other without the uttered word, much less the written. A sort of instinct about love makes all things easy to understand to the average man or woman, but a formal statement, with the addition of financial accounts, ought to be settled by a go-between.

This mode of dealing with me made me feel like a silent partner in a transaction that affected my interests, that seemed to need another "board meeting," with an "adjournment" for the present.

Then he took my hand. I blushed and trembled. All the theatrical attitudes that I had thought of a

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thousand times to be fitted for this occasion, together with my imaginary fine speeches were forgotten. No newly hatched chicken just peeping out into a strange world of huge barking monsters and two-legged giants could have acted sillier or with less composure than I did, far afield of the bravery line. The condescension of an old hen's cluck, bringing comfort and self-control to the little fledgling, would have been music indeed.

Helplessly I looked about. Oh, if only he and my father had settled it. At last, confusedly I stammered, "I am just eighteen and I do not think of marrying until I am twenty-four or twenty-five; I have promised my father not to marry, and really I could not think of it."

This stammering, ineffable lie had, however, an entirely different effect on Mr. Starwell from what I had expected, for he wildly took me in his arms and held me till his heart-throbs against my breast fairly hurt me, and kissed me until the darkness, combined with the rush of heretofore bridled passion, wearied me.

Yet, the humble confession must be made that his enfolding arms gave me a new, sweet sense of his protecting goodness to me, and when he led me to the sofa, we sat clasped in each other's arms while I listened patiently to his wooing.

Finally he bade me good-night, saying he would



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come again the next evening, when I promised to be at home.

He had said something about our mutual happiness but, as I knelt at the foot of my bed to say my nightly orison, I fervently and hopefully prayed that some way, not too disagreeable, might open for ridding me of this ogre, so pleasantly termed the "bond of marriage."

CHAPTER VII

*"Fly your kite, if you please, out of sight;
Let it go where it will in the breeze,
But cut not the one thread by which it is bound,
Be it never so high, to this poor human ground.*

* * * * *

No man is the absolute lord of his life."

AS the door had closed upon Mr. Starwell, the tall, broad-shouldered figure of my father was outlined by the light of the library at the end of the hall, as he almost filled the doorway. He had been waiting for me to describe the visit.

From long-time habit, we were used to sitting in the library far into the night to discuss the events of the day, as we sipped a glass of sherry, or champagne, and munched crackers or cake after a theatre party or late ball. We took this opportunity, in a cozy, mutual confidence, to philosophize about life and vocalize our contempt of the vanity of this frivolous world, while we praised each other, and then clasped hands and went off to bed with the righteous conviction that if any two people on this terrestrial globe

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were perfect we could line up with clear conscience to answer, "Here," should Gabriel blow his horn and ask us.

My father had what the Italians understand, but few Americans comprehend, the "*dolce far niente*" sort of nature, with a strong tendency to agree with Omar Khayyám in his *Rubaiyat*. He despised sham, or any kind of an unfair deal. Too careless of his own interests to stoop to the "bother" of telling lies or employing the petty deceits that most men consider necessary to live by, his devotion to business had dwarfed his nature less than any man of his acquaintance, or any whom I have ever known, and his frankness had the great merit of eliciting it from others.

"What had Starwell to say?" he asked, with an unusual interest in his tone and manner, as he stretched himself at length on a favorite Persian divan.

I guessed by this sign that we were to have an extra long session; also that "the speaker in the chair" would give a not too abbreviated dissertation on love, because it was his favorite topic, and one upon which he was ascribed as knowing more about than most any man in town. He seemed to wish to preface my remarks with the usual harangue, which had not the charm of novelty in my ears, but with polite determination I waited until he should again ask the question, which he did.

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"You have not accepted him, have you? Of course, you must be your own judge in an affair of the heart, but do you love him, or do you know what constitutes love?"

I replied, "Mr. Starwell declares that he cannot live without me, and that seemed to him to be the most important part of the situation, but meant as much to me as a logarithm would mean to a fish. He says that he is unworthy of me but that he will try to make me happy. He told me how much he was worth — he must be a very rich man — and that it should all be mine, his wealth, you know."

My father ran his tapering fingers through his thick hair, showing by his manner that he was conscious of my woeful lack of appreciation or sympathy with the man's heart while I was so happily glib about his pocketbook.

"Tell me, daughter, how do you feel about it? Will you marry him?"

I was obliged to choke down a lot of radical heresy but to please my father I had to voice his ideas. With me the question was not so much of being able to live without Mr. Starwell as how I could expect to be happy when I considered that such an alliance would last a lifetime. The question in my mind then was, how any man, if it did not concern his earning a living for her, could be necessary to a woman, as Mr. Starwell had said I was to him.



CHAPTER VIII

"The world, and life, 's too big to pass for a dream."

MY mother had always given me splendid advice as to how to shape life worthily and nobly, to have high aims and to be unselfishly employed. When she talked to me of marriage she had said: "It is all a lottery, the woman is the one sacrificed. If you wish to exchange freedom from care and responsibility, with an untrammelled spirit, for a master who puts upon you constantly increasing burdens as the years go by, then do not ever blame me for your folly. A woman not only has to bring children into the world but, usually, she must re-create both her husband and herself before she can adjust herself to the new condition of things." As though her psychic sense saw my confused, controverted thoughts, she explained: "No woman ever marries the man she thinks she does. We are too eager to make a good impression out of a bad reality. Young people believe in affinity and all that sort of starlight, which it is well for the world that they can believe in, but such ideas are mostly exploited by folk who

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are experienced in the grafter's art of one kind or another. It is the law that requires the sacrifice of the individual for the good of the race, and the brunt and blame of all this foolhardiness mostly falls to the lot of womanhood."

As I looked earnestly at her, thinking the while of the uncomplaining self-sacrifice in her own married life, she continued, sadly, "Do not look at me reproachfully, for I do not want to influence anyone against marriage who has a desire for it."

The golden part of my freedom and youth had flashed by in three months and the time had come when there must be a decision, for Mr. Starwell had established himself as my lover, with all a lover's privileges. He was proclaiming his happiness to his club friends—who were ordering things at the silversmiths and having designs prepared for loving-cups for him.

Women—rich, charming women—were lying in ambush to tell him how surprised they were that so unsophisticated and insignificant a woman could please so superior a man, giving him their confidence and hinting that if ever he needed solace in his lonely future he would always find a welcome place beside their hearthstones.

He took my mild resistance for maidenly reserve. The lie I was living was too tremendous for even my own comprehension. Still, at times conscience seemed

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involved in my decision and I felt like a customer who fears she is buying a thing too dear for her purse, and a true instinct told me I would pay a heavy price for a thing not wanted.

My increasing reticence only goaded him to impatience as he urged me to set the day for the marriage. It was hard for me to say "yes," yet it was as difficult to send so large a check to protest. It was beginning to dawn upon me that the out-of-reach things are the things that we must have to complete our self-content.

The usual thing while we are young is that we believe devoutly in love; that is, until we beseech the strange gods; before our dead ideals make us indifferent and hard, or a desolate altar makes us curse God and die.

All the competing belles and dowagers dropping out of line, believed my indifference to this so-called "success" to be a pose. They said that for a school-girl, without opportunity or future hope, or chaperon, to put on such airs was ridiculous.

To my pleadings that we wait a few years Mr. Starwell would always reply, "We will marry now or never," with the curt, business-like tone by which he always subdued my mild protests.

I longed to tell him—yet never had the courage to—that what he thought was white, was black; that insincerity and lies were as truth to him. I



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prayed to God, and trusted to my luck to release me from the meshes he wound around me.

He thought me to be a plain, simple school-girl who was fond of him, and who was willing to be his slave, and did not suspect me to be the jumble of inconsistencies which later he found me to be. Always successful in his business undertakings he never dreamed of a possible repulse in his first amour. He did not realize that love must come of itself — that it cannot be forced or cajoled; neither did he know that the heart must be primed for receiving the sacred spark. This he was not ideal nor sensitive enough to know; nor that the waiting, the longing, and suffering heart oftenest craves a lover. He had always coveted a new, untried heart; he had found one and his simple nature knew no further necessity. He knew nothing of the complexity of a philandering heart. Some women are born coquettes, which is not saying that they are born dishonest, but it is one way of spelling their inordinate vanity.

I had accepted his favors as a matter of course, without laying stress on the fact that my every wish had been anticipated and gratified. Every offering that his love devised I had accepted, thinking more of my manner of accepting them than of him or the thoughtful care that had prompted them. Could it be possible that this thin, blue-eyed, white-faced man took himself, and me, seriously?

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There were many ways of explaining myself to others, but modesty forbade me from showing myself to him as I really was.

He finally cajoled me to set the day for our wedding. The slim excuses brought against our marriage did not avail and, possessed of a disposition to swim with the tide, it was always easier to accept conditions with terms of peace, than to refuse them with war declared. Then, too, I felt that, in the language of the world, this marriage would give me the "grand entrée" into a society above that of the ordinary, egotistical persons about me who believed in the large lion's share for themselves. Not endowed with the virtue of those thrown outside the social order, that is expressed as "honesty of the galleys," my egotism rested secure in his persistent, blind adoration, as I proudly named his devotion. He evidently intended to "monopolize" me, as he termed it. Even in our silly lovers' prattle there was the hallmark of a man's nature to possess, accompanied by his idea of a woman anxious to be possessed, submission.

As yet I knew nothing of the great wealth there is in life when love comes into it, for I still lived within the hard mussel shell that shut in my narrow existence. None of the men about me could in any way replace Mr. Starwell in the affection that his pursuit and assiduous attentions had brought forth, but yet this commercialism of holding one man as a lover

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till, possibly, a more eligible one should appear brought a blush to my cheek, but that was all.

He prevailed over all my weak objections, and rented a house, which he enthusiastically commenced to furnish, without suggestions from me.

To any demur of mine he would say: "You little termagant, the charm would be gone if we waited. Let me show you the world, it is not a place for a woman like you to be alone in. You need a protector, a husband, who, with his arms about you and his heart yours, will show you what a paradise it may be with love to hallow the common things in it, and throw the magic veil of love and kindness about you. Believe me, dearest, without this you would become a sad, lonely woman. Your child heart is not awakened, but I long to take it, make it mine, nurture it and see it blossom grandly to all the things that are most dear to me."

He said, "Love is the only valuable thing in life, dear. Subtract it from ourselves and where would we turn to find the beautiful, the satisfying things? My life will be devoted to you."

As one who hears an unknown tongue I listened to this new language, that meant nothing to my bounding, careless youth. As a worm that cannot calculate beyond the leaf upon which it finds its subsistence, there seemed to be no more reason why I should love Mr. Starwell than — well, for instance,



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why he should not love me. There is no use in trying to answer this argumentative Janus, I thought impatiently. If he has found his golden fleece, it is best to let the miracle perform itself. It surely would. Something was bound to "happen," for my prayers were as devout as the anonymous invocation of a pious, newly-enlightened heathen:

"Asked, or unasked, things good, great Jove supply.
Things evil, though we ask for them, deny."

The running, seething lava bed of love and passion that the novelists write about was to me merely as light is to the blind.

CHAPTER IX

*"Short is the rose's bloom, and another morn
Will show no rose, but in its stead a thorn."*

MY dear Kate:
Will you favor us again a week from tomorrow evening, April eleventh, at the Newsboys' Home? They were all so wildly interested in you last time, and have been clamoring for 'de lady who made us laff.' Read the humorous things and sing the songs you know so well please the boys. It is a very bright spot in their lives, these hours that you give them, and God will surely bless you for your kindness.

Please send the titles of your numbers; also ask any friends who might be interested in the work.

Sincerely,

NANNETTE HARK.

I gave this letter to Mr. Starwell, saying: "Have you ever taken part in charity bazaars? They are my chief occupation. I would like to have you go with me and talk to the boys about how to succeed, or how to become rich, though it might bore you."

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Suddenly his face clouded and looking at me with an expression I had never seen before, he said coldly:

"It is not best for you to appear in public if you wish to please me. A woman never gains any of the world's respect by appearing before it as a puppet. You amuse them, they pay for the pleasure, but a forfeiture is demanded of the one who so condescends."

"Condescends!" I cried, "why, my dear, there is nothing of the sort, it's a question of a few homeless waifs to be cheered, their little sordid lives to be brightened; maybe a song or two will do them good. Who knows how their young souls may long for a happiness they cannot get amid low, brutal associates."

"Oh, well," he replied, "I was a poor boy once, but I owe nothing to society girls singing to me."

"Now you are — well, you had a mother, a good one, for all real, good men have owed more than even the best of them admit to their mothers," I said, "but these poor boys are homeless."

"Oh, their mothers! the better they were the fewer are the heroics written of them. Truth before favor, the weakness of men, but we are getting into a dispute for which there is no reason. Listen, my dear, you are getting obstreperous, you are miles away from me."



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I thought a moment, trying to understand him, and then said, "Don't you think a voice is a divine gift? Can a woman ignore such a possession? Is it right to refuse to give the pleasure of a few beautiful songs to these outcast children, who hear only the hurdy-gurdies and ribald songs in the saloons? Would you deny a little attention to children who never know kindness, let alone the petting that other little ones are surfeited with by overfond parents? Condescend! why, have you ever seen their little faces light up, or have you heard them gayly whistle the refrain as they kept time with their feet and hands in a wondrous, strained delight at hearing good music? Little faces hardened by sin, begrimed with dirt; many of them case-hardened or foolish; reared as criminals, and yet many of them grow up as useful citizens. Can you say it is wrong or vain to sing ditties to these and give them one pleasant thing to look back upon in their desolate, lonely childhood?"

Not choosing his words but stabbing carelessly at my illusions, he said sourly: "It would be better to pay for having that sort of thing done. You are my — well, we are soon to be married, then you will not be allowed to do such a thing, for I will not have it."

He was terribly in earnest, his words were a stinging reproof, and sounded as if he would bully me. Keeping back the words that were persistently determined on being said I hurried away from the ground

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that tempted me to argue with him, saying: "A kind word or a gentle look may save a soul, may become a source of goodness to vibrate through all eternity. To smother a good impulse might be the first step to a downward course. You said once that you never refused money to charity. That is fine and I appreciate it, but money is not all the saving grace there is. Christ taught that a cup of cold water, or any good, however slight, that came within our power to do, would be counted greater than the blazoned million-dollar gift, donated for the *éclat* or acclaim of the thing.

"It is the deed inspired by an innate generosity, not the money doled from the pocketbook, mostly inspired by selfishness, that counts and that is our reward. Our moral philosophy at school used to say 'the crime of a deed lay in what the motive was that fathered it.' God commands us to keep our hearts pure, he does not say keep your purse filled. Pay, pay for a song sung to those boys! The chink of the coin might drown out the music for them. Their perceptions are keen and their instincts sure."

Hesitating in my excitement to watch his face, I was convinced that this sermon was to deaf ears, determined not to listen.

"You may put on this armor against all entreaty, but if you go to war, you will have to do all the fighting. I know you would enjoy seeing these little

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gamins with their wondering smile and their queer little gallantries," I said.

"Dirty newsboys do not interest me in the least. If they have to be sung to and elocutionized, I will pay the best artist procurable to do it, but certainly no one shall witness my wife making such a spectacle of herself."

"Wife! I am not yet your wife, and you are assuming a good deal in taking such strong measures in thus defying my pet fads on the eve of our marriage."

"You mean it all for the best," he said relentlessly, "but, of course, you cannot know how strongly opposed I am to that sort of thing. As a lover I ask you to renounce it. The position we hold to each other, my age, and sincere wish for your happiness all tend not to make this seem to be an aggressive demand on my part but merely my right as your future husband, and your pleasure in pleasing me. We are so soon to be married that we might practice some forbearance beforehand."

This made me wince. Observing that a conflict of emotions was going on in my mind, he said:

"Kate, dearest, be all mine, do not make me share you with a gaping, foolish public."

But, the iron had been struck—the die cast, we crossed hands over a chasm.

Professing fatigue, and a wish to retire early, he



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soon left me, with tender assurances of his affection.

As I went to my room I thought to myself, "If he objects to my just singing a few songs to the boys at the Home, what will he say to my taking part in the play we are rehearsing?"

From infancy all values had come to me through the medium of my voice. To pour out my fresh, passionate soul in melody that had set audiences wild was to me more than meat and drink. Applause never failed to follow my efforts. Flowers were showered upon me; almost fulsome praise dealt to me. My self-sufficiency had been nourished to a dangerous degree.

In those days all life was a song to me. Even religion, to which my soul devoutly knelt, was a song; it was the interpretation of all things. Now, wandering along the road happy in this assurance, suddenly a wall of disapproval barred my path — to what? to everything that I had hugged to my heart as most dear.

He had ordered me to let fall the bright burden of flowery color and perfume, and take up the gray cloak of his authority, dress myself in it, obey only his wish, put my own desires aside and follow him in the search for happiness, which could not help being prosaic with a man of such indomitable will.

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To yield to him now would be to put the shackles on my wrists and myself lock them forever.

Instead of calling to take me to the newsboys' meeting, he wrote:

Dear Kate:

If an unobtrusive domestic life is most worthy and noble, and the one from which the greatest happiness comes, as the best thought of the age seems to teach, then it is certainly true that anything which savors of the stage or public life is an inelegant thing to do.

Modesty is woman's sweetest charm, and now, while the committee have ample time to procure others to fill the doubtful rôle, you will surely not permit friends to persuade you against the decision of your better judgment. The devotion of a lover is often better than the cold and almost momentary applause of the public.

Sincerely yours,

RALPH STARWELL.

As I read this note I thought: what would life become to one living with such a man? Did he think a woman must be wholly a household grub, or a society butterfly; to give nothing but receive all? Could he really be grooved in an idiosyncrasy as gross as this? The white rays of my engagement ring scintillated on my third finger. It reminded me that I was a liar, and I hated myself.

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It was a diamond, that betokened to me a small but neat and respectable housekeeping establishment, with one servant, and a well-brought-up, obedient family. I would probably endure the usual marital quarrels, not so violent as some, perhaps, nor so passionately patched up for the time being, but very polite quarrels, with the self-control that generally bespeaks lack of genuine enthusiasm in anything. Was my talent, my beauty, the power I had of exciting admiration, all to sink in this morass called marriage; to rise up in my nostrils a miasma of despair at a lost opportunity?

Why should I enter into this animal-like relation with a man simply to suit the conventionalities of the world and to escape the opprobrium put by society upon the words "old maid," when all knew that love was really the only binding law in such a contract?

But we are not alone in making our misery vital. Our dear friends are more apt than sworn enemies to aid in the work. Not what we suffer, but how much of that suffering is due to the knowledge our neighbor has of it, is often the test of our endurance.

"What," cried Harry Ruhling, an old-time habitué of our house, "not want you to do this, that, or the other thing, the old fossil; but when men get to be his age they are intolerant. I wondered why you were not at the rehearsal; it put a damper on everybody, because you certainly do that soubrette part

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better than anyone else. Surely you are not going to give us the 'go by.' The thing would fall flat, and you know the charity is dependent on the bazaars and theatricals. The night you were not there for rehearsal a girl who had once played your part, took it, but acted so badly we saw it would be no use unless you played it. Now, don't get crazy over this new glitter and prefer to sit in a box at the opera with an old man, rather than to act for charity. He will be jealous, all old men are of young wives, and that is hell. You have so many friends, and are so young, just eighteen, to give yourself to such an old duffer certainly is a shame."

He only stopped to take breath and continued: "At the opera the other night he never took his eyes off you, and when it was over he rushed you away before anyone could get to speak to you. Are you happy with just him, or do you feel the sadness that your eyes sometimes show?"

"He will likely take you out in the country somewhere and you will just keep house, maybe have a lot of children (why will women for whom their friends pick out the grandest future do that sort of thing?), while some dried up girl who is as uninviting as a stack of straw, that you could not drive a mule to eat, will pick the Apollo of the season who wallows in such a bunch of money that he has to have a kinetoscope picture to show her how to spend it.

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You could marry anyone you wanted to; don't marry a man because you are afraid to break off an engagement."

"There is some honor in regard to giving one's word about so solemn a thing as marriage, and I cannot break my promise now," I replied.

"Bosh," said Harry sneeringly, "no girl ever marries her first love. If that were the case the world would be filled with driveling young idiots, and what is a mere broken word of honor in such a case as compared with happiness, or even contentment?"

"It is best for a woman to marry, Harry; there is not much show for a woman anywhere without a man attached to her. You can't even go to some restaurants, they tell me, after six o'clock, without a man, and there is no objection to this man, he has the approval of my entire family."

"You must, of course, do as you like or think best, but oh, my Königen, I would like to see you the queen you should be and rule your own fate. I can see there is not — well, Kate, if you write me and tell me that you abide by your conscience, and that you will not marry this man, I will give you one of the dinners of history."

"Oh, don't let us talk about it, Harry," I said, while a sickening dread as of a criminal who is about to be condemned leaped in my throbbing heart; "don't you see it can't be done like that now. It is too late,

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the house is rented and furnished, my trousseau is all finished, and his valet told our maid that his master's things were all in apple-pie order, and even his shoes were packed. Now we are only waiting for the wedding day, which is within too short a time to make any change, for people would never give me credit for having an iota of brains.

"He is about as happy as a boy with a new top, and he believes me to be as happy as he is. I dare not undeceive him now. Besides, it does not seem possible that he is twenty-five years older than I am, still, an old man is preferable to a young man in my estimation. Young men for war and old men for council, and you know if anyone is in need of mental ballast it is yours humbly. A man whom a woman can lean on is my ideal. Young men are good to look at and flirt with, to bid to fetch and carry while they protest their love, but to marry—deliver me. For home life and solid comfort, give me the old horse who has gone through the hay fields till they are a stale story to him. No, Harry, with all due respect to you, no young man for me, thank you."

"Very well, so be it," he replied as he came a step nearer to me. "It is not very polite perhaps to say after all this, that you do not impress one with being wildly in love; also, I fear that you do not dare face the bare facts in the case. We dress up our living lies as we do our bodies, so that an old hag may be made



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to represent good looks. You girls do not realize what you are doing as well as we men do. A Parsee widow puts herself on a burning funeral pyre for her dead husband. You are not much better or more enlightened."

Harry left me, finally. The sky was gloomy gray and hung low, while the air was cold with that inhospitable chill of April. All day my trouble had taken my appetite away, and now, cold and hungry, the world seemed barren of any possible good or cheer. As I passed a mirror and caught sight of my face, its old, sallow look startled me. What was there to worry over? No one could possibly understand because I could not myself have described what I was suffering.

If only there could be an excuse trumped up of need for going abroad for my health, and I could acquire the right sort of chaperon to travel with me for two years, I would show them all what could be done. Chaperons are born, not made. At this time of greatest need in a young girl's life there are kaleidoscopic qualities of character required for this tender occupation that are too manifold to be enumerated. To select a chaperon offhand is like buying candy from appearance in a French shop; a trial is a necessity to prove its value.

In a moral test a woman must not reckon without her arch enemy, woman, whom, if she counts as friend

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from a natural fear, is sure to stop the cogs that would have revolved around her to the height of her desires.

No woman who is innocent is safe in society. I flattered myself that my *début* had been a success. Having launched my bark I was now to lie in port without further test. This question of marrying involved my whole future career. Was I to fold my hands; to automatically do as other minds should dictate?

Why was I not capable of another coup, to campaign a trip abroad, be received at court, conquer society on the continent? There was money to be considered. Perhaps after all it would be best to marry. Married women had the upper hand of young girls, which amounts principally to a prestige which is the result of what is commonly called — experience.

"He who hesitates is lost." A wavering decision could never be a good one. The longer it was delayed the more scandal would be attached to it, and there is really no need of one's neighbors knowing all you do all the time. It must be final. My happiness against his overwhelming will.

I would write to Harry, as my best friend. The action seemed an involuntary one, for I sat down deliberately and wrote a letter to Harry, then, realizing its baseness, I laid it aside and wrote to Mr. Starwell that all my evenings would be engaged with rehearsals that week, and as he was not much interested in such

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things I would not ask him to attend them with me.

His answer to this was awaited with more anxiety than I had supposed possible. He took me at my word. In a severe upper cut that completely flouted my pose, he told me that he had no idea of opposing my wish — yet the words now appeared to be so brutal that I tore that part of the letter to shreds. The rest of it I read over and over till every word was indelibly stamped upon my memory. In the stilted style in which he always wrote or talked to me, he continued :

I could give myself up to sentiment with complete self-abandonment till after marriage, when, by a freedom, a constant loyalty, a manly life and a thousand love-devices our union and happiness would become more dear, more complete, until we should be absorbed in the perfect essence which alone endures, a mere foretaste of which we can attain to here below.

I am convinced that we have put off our wedding-day too long already. That the intoxicating swirl in which every attractive maiden from seventeen to twenty-four is borne on,— of which you have so often spoken — has already left a drop of poison in your cup, and now, in justice to yourself and gratification of your curiosity you ought, perhaps, to mingle in the world these years, witness the flattery (which I regret you have already tasted of), listen to the proffers of love and devotion, drink deep of the

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sweets, but Heaven forbid of all the bitter quaffs, and at the end of that time, or during it, you will choose from out the legion, and give way to others who will follow.

For, if you should now set down the sparkling cup which is so beautiful and seductive, without drinking it to its dregs, and relapse into only our love forever, the fact that you had not scanned the page carefully before marriage might make you unhappy afterward, and it is only because I seem to detect this growing danger that I would suggest to you,—with the highest consideration of only your happiness, for Heaven knows that for the past few months I have had no other desire or joy,—that you be as free and happy as you so richly deserve.

But if you still have the desire that the waves of love which have beaten on our breasts continue, but with that added charm a peaceful sea, through life, I believe it will ever have a sweeter flow because that I now offer up this sacrifice and say to you, sweet bird, go free.

Then, if I feel the soft tendrils gently cling, I shall be a towering oak deeply rooted and strong to defend, and as I look out over the smaller trees (for I will rise above the common herd and I will see the distant storm, or welcome the tripping sunshine), I will communicate it with assurance, or a kiss to the vine which clings, and almost conceals with its rich foliage of love.

Sincerely, and ever, in any condition of life,

Your friend,

RALPH STARWELL.



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Blinding, raging tears, with a realizing sense of an irreparable loss overwhelmed me.

My father returned from business and missing my usual greeting came to my room to ask the cause, and found me in a state of what I then misunderstood to be grief, but which I now see was only wounded pride. With his hands in his pockets he stood before the window waiting for me to be calm, for he expected the confidence which he had always received.

After the storm had subsided and he had heard the letter which had caused it, he remarked: "He must have offered you only the ashes of a burnt-out love. It would be well to send him his ring and letters, for he has finished his part of the deal. He is not the man for you, anyway, that is evident."

These words threw me into a spasm of self pity, which my father did not care to witness and therefore left the room, allowing me the luxury of my grief alone.

CHAPTER X

"If some matches were made in Heaven, they were dipped in Hell."

CHILDREN rarely confide in their parents but would rather go to anyone else for a sympathy that may not be an alleviation of their troubles but amounts to a good of a certain kind. So I, now, in my present state, appealed to Miss Basseau, my former French governess, who, with a spinster's regret for her own single-blessedness, urged me to "be reasonable."

"This is the opportunity of your life," she said, with an impressive manner she had when in earnest. "A woman should always look to mating herself well before any other consideration, for no matter how disagreeable it may seem to have to admit it, the men really do make up a large half of what we can never hope to supply. This man is unique in his love — he will never be to anyone else what he is to you.

"Dear child," she continued, with a quaint accent that lent a peculiar pathos to her words, "you are young and pretty now, but you will not always be so. Let me telegraph for the gentleman to come to you."

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"Oh, Miss Basseau, don't yet. Can't you persuade him to wait two or three years? I do so dread to marry. How few are happily married. Did you ever know of anyone? It seems as if every man and woman living together do so mostly for the good opinion of the public and not because they really love each other. It's children or money, women or whiskey, sometimes just bad temper and nerves, but whatever the cause, it is not possible for me to believe that two different natures are quite as contented all their lives as they seem and try to appear to their friends."

"Oh, my dear, you are unnatural, surely marriage is the only state for a woman. I can't go into details and argue it out, for you are too young to be convinced thus, for this is not so much of the head as of the heart. I have been affianced three times and each of my lovers died. That is the reason I have gone on in my lonely way all these years; it was not choice with me, no one could ever be so lost to human feeling as to utterly throw away the real reason for our being on earth. To love and to be loved is the greatest thing in life."

The tender interest that she took in me, and the unusual sight of anyone pleading for my happiness in this disinterested way made me want to accept her views. The quality of real sympathy in her voice appealed to me and softened my heart as the sun will



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melt ice. Clasped in each other's arms we wept together, she for the sad memories of the past, and I for the sadness that my heart whispered would surely be mine.

She sent a telegram for Mr. Starwell to come, but it was not answered. This new slight, his letter and Miss Basseau's kindness were enough to keep me awake most of the night, crying with sympathy for myself. To a complex nature nothing is quite so humiliating as wounded vanity.

Next morning, with a heavy weight on my heart, I had the discouraged resentment that a man has whose ammunition has given out just as the enemy comes upon him. At this point I needed all my resources, and at no time had I ever felt so helpless.

Hideous thing that I was, for as I looked in the glass and saw my sallow, swollen face with its irregular features, my listless, tired eyes, and my limp flannel wrapper, I certainly felt that life would be extremely dull if it was to be colored by this morning's outlook.

After breakfast, sitting down at my desk, from where I could look out of the window, my eyes looked upon a dark world, indeed. The lawn was black and rusty, the clouds, too heavy to move, weighed like a pall. Below stairs the dressmaker worked at my lingerie. The monotonous whirr of the machine somewhat rested my tired head, and I felt defiant contempt

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for my fate, which a strange premonition predicted would not be happy.

The voice of my mother calling me awoke me from my revery. Likely it was only a seam to sew, or some advice that was wanted — but the tone of her voice sounded peculiar.

Stupidly walking into the hall I ran into Mr. Starwell standing beside my mother.

For some moments we faced each other without uttering a word but only looking into centuries of past and future time that lovers about to part intuitively see. "Mamma," I cried finally, "what is the matter?"

"Mr. Starwell said he received a telegram from you last night to come immediately," she said, trying to be matter of fact, "but as he was at the club dining he did not get here until too late, so he came this morning, and as the parlor is being swept, and the painters are in the library, with people coming and going, and you want to be undisturbed, I brought him up here."

So he did come; he was not determined to utterly annihilate me, he did love me.

Love is a faith. This faith is a happiness, illumination, and strength. This was my rock of hope, I had but to ask his forgiveness. The light in his eyes assured me it was already granted.

"Oh, Mr. Starwell, I am so sorry."

He quietly took me in his arms without uttering a

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word of reproach. There was a solemn note in his manner. The bodily contact was comforting, it gave an impression of being shielded from the worst evils, which are mainly outside the charmed circle of a lover's embrace, but I could not rid myself of the feeling that the curtain was slowly going down on a drama that we, as chief actors, could not afford to condemn or praise.

The ivory and silver doors of the Temple of Siva were slowly opened, while the rich perfume of a crushed love would soon be wafted to exalt her shrine.

The belief could not be changed, even in this tragic moment, that Mr. Starwell wanted a woman of nice, ladylike qualities, admirably expressed in manner — a woman of ideas, or such as I would likely become in after years with the developing growth that freedom to follow out my own conception of life would bring.

To know one's self is the beginning and end of knowledge, and at that time I knew that an unfortunate exaggeration pervaded all my personality, and to this I partly owed my unhappiness. Yet I knew, as far as he was concerned, I would be a cumbersome quantity, and as to home-making, I was aware that I would be as adaptable as a basaltic marble statue of Rameses in a cottage.

We entered the room that was both den and sleeping room. He waited. The moment seemed to de-

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mand a capitulation on my part. Humbly I began: "Yesterday I realized how wicked I had been, how much of my happiness I owed to your love as I wrote to you what I dared not say. Here is one of the letters."

He took what I handed to him and read while I watched the expression of his face, which changed to an illuminated gladness. The deprecating, reserved air that he wore when he entered the room had gone. He took my face in his hands to kiss me reverently, then he read another letter:

"My Dear Lover:

"There is no insanity like that brought on by love. 'A sound heart is the life of the flesh' is a proverb that is really true, for my whole body is faint, restless and miserable when my love for you is disturbed. As a clear fountain in the sunshine gladdens all around, so your love is my joy.

"For months doubt has tortured me; whether I would live long enough to marry has been a source of misery. But now all that has frothed to the top to be blown away from this cup that is clear and sparkling with your love and confidence.

"Darling, sweet, forgive me all the sorrow you have suffered on my account — let me show how much we can be to each other; for to know that you are mine, after some of our storms, makes me forget all



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else and, as a pain relieved, rest after fatigue, or a broken bridge safely crossed, your love soothes my torment. 'The King can do no wrong. Long live the King,' and the king is mine.

"To give up everything in life for you would be nothing. The insincerities and insipidness of a life such as mine would be a weak sacrifice if it could value yours.

"My darling, my love, come to me this once and it will be a sealed favor forever, for I will be your devoted slave from now on. I cannot love you more, I cannot, dearest.— Good night.

"KATE."

Without speaking he looked at me with an expression of ineffable sweetness as he turned to the other letter, which he still held in his hand, and read what to me at that time seemed the acme of perfectly expressed sentiment, judged from my acquaintance with novels:

"O my love, let not my bold words entirely hide the blushes that mount to my cheeks as I tell you that I kneel at your feet to be forgiven. Ask anything of me that you may make me happy, you will see with what swift obedience your command will be obeyed. While I am not good enough for so high a service, I am all unworthy of you, as you have told

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me in the humility of your large-hearted generosity that you were unworthy of me. Let us clasp hands, then, and go down the hill of life together.

"Sweetheart, I am in an agony of suspense. Do not doubt me, try once more. I will be your willing slave, always ready for your purpose. Believe in my penitence. Dry my tears. Look into my heart and find only thy image enshrined there.

"Always yours,

"KATE."

Rhetoric won, he believed me, he succumbed to my wiles. The drama of a life may be the outcome of a lie.

At last, springing from his chair with the old time nervous alertness, he cried: "Oh, darling, my sweet wife."

We stood long clasped in each other's embrace, with a swooning kiss that made me utterly oblivious of the unacknowledged real feeling toward him. The golden calf was still an immune from the prayers of the child of God. If it was my fate, if it was really meant that I should marry him, then I must, for as yet the miracle had not happened. The voice from out the Heavens had not yet been heard. I was handling the electric wires rather industriously.

Mr. Starwell had an old habit of talking to himself, even in my presence. He had murmured, as he lightly

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brushed my mouth, cheeks and neck with his burning lips: "These letters are not the old-time virgin flickerings of Diana's altar but the fierce fires for Hymen's shrine."

For some occult reason I went to the window and looked out upon the barn and the not yet spaded vegetable garden, where a few chickens were scratching. A rooster mounted a dunghill, flapped his wings, and shook his red comb in a flaunt of excitement produced by the success of his glib performance, and crowed lustily. Afterwards, with a strut, he deigned to descend among his harem to the vulgar duty of scratching for a living.

"It is going to rain," I said to Mr. Starwell, for with cooled, everyday senses, his appearance did not keep up to the exalted grade my love would have made for him had it been genuine.

"It is going to rain kisses on your little benighted head," he said as he again imprisoned me.

That view of the kitchen garden gave me the old-time feeling stronger than ever, that all the alluring things were out beyond the home, where one could take the stopper off and be free — but life must always have a measure of sadness in it. No one but a fat, fatuous person could put any other meaning upon it.

He looked about him, as if his surroundings had only just attracted his attention.

"What an odd place a girl's room is, all strung

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with cotillion favors, programmes, dinner cards, yacht flags, pictures and queer nicknacks that would give a man the nightmare. Is that tall, grave-looking piece of furniture your writing desk?" he asked.

"Yes, all the writing I ever did since childhood is stowed away in that."

"Your escritoire has a literary disorder about it quite striking."

Observing his remark I went to the desk to straighten out the papers. Instinctively I tried to conceal my letter to Harry that lay exposed. With the unerring eye of a lover he detected something was wrong. I tried to tear the thick paper but he hastily snatched it from me before I had time to destroy it.

"Is this one worse than the others?" he asked laughing, as he gave me another hug.

"No, no, this is not for you." I seized it, but not quick enough, for his strong hand clutched it the tighter. "Please, Mr. Starwell, oh, for heaven's sake, please don't look at it!" running after him as he playfully dodged me. Fighting him frantically, panting and exhausted, when I finally caught him, I got possession of it to tear it into bits, and throw them in the wastebasket. I was about to set fire to them as they dropped into the basket, but too late, for with an instinct almost inhuman he picked out those particular pieces from among the others and thrust them in an

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inside pocket as he said: "Now I must go. Can you go with me?"

"If you can wait until I dress."

He waited, and we started away together.

"Thatcher had an experience like this once," he said. "I can understand now why he never married, for it would be impossible for me to marry anyone but you."

Thatcher, an intimate friend of his, was always quoted as a criterion for everything. Hypocrite that I was, I pretended to subscribe to this with an understandingly similar expression.

If only somebody could have told me what this love was that we read of and talked so much about, it would have been easier for me. Novelists and poets eulogized the sentiment as an exalted one. Everyone spoke of "marrying for love" as if it were some great virtue, and sneered with commiserating contempt, or bare tolerance, of the school-teacher or old maid who raised herself above penury by marriage — never once did anyone give her credit for anything, except an astute intelligence that savored closely of an unmentionable crime — that of marrying for money. Why anyone should want to marry at all was the principal question that agitated my mind at that time. Yet, enmeshed by some force which it was impossible for me in my utterly ignorant state to comprehend, the world was looking on at the spec-

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tacle of a young girl giving her consent to an alliance against her will, when she could not know by whom or by what force she was coerced.

An apple woman sat opposite to us in the car. "Such people are the happiest in the world," said Mr. Starwell, as he contemplated her flabby, empty face and huge stomach, over which her dirty hands were clasped.

She certainly did not look as if she was distressed as to whether she was enough in love to marry or not, nor, whether the existence of the ideal was anything at all to her.

From this greasy mass of flesh my eyes looked upon my fiancé and contrasted his thin frame; that long, white face that looked like a cameo at night, and which now had a keen, hawk-like expression that his large nose seemed to accentuate.

The unvarnished truth was that I would marry this man, while philosophers would aver, what seemed inevitable and degrading to my shrinking soul, that I would love elsewhere. Marry him I must, that was certain, if for nothing else than because the fact existed of my trousseau, our house, and engaged servants—all waiting for an exceedingly silly girl to decide.

It was never difficult for him to read my thought. Now he turned to me saying: "It is a wonder to me that you ever took a liking to me. One would think



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that you would marry a large, black-eyed man. The imperious sort, with dash and go, who would quote poetry to you, or fight a duel for you, instead of a prosaic, antique business duffer like myself, with his nose to the grindstone and without a verse of poetry in his head, who would certainly never be picturesque with a sword in his hand as he shouted defiance to the world, or everlasting restitution to his love."

We had returned to my door, and as he said, "Good-bye, my darling, until to-morrow night," I wished it might be until the last forever.

CHAPTER XI

*"And loving him so, I would rather be
The one he let go — and then vaguely desired,
Than, winning him, once in his face to see
The look of a love grown tired."*

INSTEAD of spending the evening as usual, around the library table, where the soft lamplight encouraged the family to gather with their books or work, I retired early, worn out by a day of mental fatigue which had left to me but the mere shreds of my usual unwonted energy. The empty house was deathly still, and the wind outside whistled mournfully. A dread of some unknown approaching evil oppressed me, which the old-time bad omen of a loud crack of a piece of furniture did not lessen.

Superstitious by nature, I opened the Bible at random to see what my fate would read there, but only prophecies of destruction and evil met my gaze, and revealed to me that my fears were not wholly unfounded.

Heretofore insomnia was only a word in my vocabulary, but to-night it became experience. As my

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fiancé's letters were often read in bed it seemed an alluring thing now to woo sleep by these lovely words that were so sweetly soothing. Morpheus was just hovering near me when the sleepy voice of the maid announced Mr. Starwell.

It was ten o'clock. In a trembling haste I instinctively put on my most becoming gown. How do intriguing women keep their health, I mentally asked, let alone their complexions and nerves? Do light women who lay siege to men's hearts by coquetry rely on their own charms or the gullibility of the men? Do they prefer the lady-killer style? Why do so many women fasten their affections on poodle dogs, or canary birds, or children, as a safeguard? Do the women who bring their lovers to the puppet stage that answers to any string really feel satisfaction in that or do they turn longingly again to another man to conquer? Can a woman travel the Primrose Path and keep happy, or does her heart go through a gradual process of petrification first?

These, and many more absurd questions partly aroused my half awakened brain. My novice was sleep dispelling, peace destroying.

Always a lightning dresser, curiosity now made me a record breaker in my rapid change. Without gayety but certainly not sad, I hastened into the cold, dark parlor with its gray painted walls, its plain, forbidding atmosphere, the very air of which had the

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chill of a tomb, but, ah! was this a veritable corpse? Could merely black clothes make a man look as though he had come out of a coffin?

My body shivered, my teeth chattered, I could not move. One goes from the broiling sun of summer into a refrigerator to get this benumbing sensation of cold.

Why did he stand mute, with glazed, staring eyes? I fairly screamed his name as I felt that I tried not to show any fear of him, as one tries to disguise it from a madman. A conquering determination compelled me to seize his hand, as if I feared that he intended to strike me. Secret contempt flays the soul alive; physical retaliation, on the other hand, is a natural satisfaction. I ran into the next room and as a relief from this horrible scrutiny I stirred up the ashes that littered the hearth. A few dying embers burst into living coals. He had followed me and his gaze, that I felt, rather than saw, seemed to penetrate my blackened soul. Kindness or forgiveness sometimes permits us to see the beauty that flows like visible music through the nudity of goodness, but with hate alive within us we are blind to that goodness. His mind was filled with the evil thing I was, and this thought permeated my being, degraded me in my own mind and made me feel myself all that he thought I was. With parched throat and clenched hands I waited.

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He approached me and as he did so he stepped on the edge of my black silk gown. As if the contact was an offense to his self-respect he made a gesture that hurt me worse than a knife thrust in the naked flesh would have done.

Was this the man who less than a day past had annoyed me by his fervent declarations of love? A cub suddenly grown to a snarling lion roaring at me in a rage could not have been a more astonishing spectacle. Had a judge come to indict a witness at the bar? Was this my former lover whose passionate avowals had so recently only bored me? I remembered having put on a fresh rose and sought it, but its crushed petals fell at my feet and I wondered if they could ever again be restored in their pink loveliness to their original stem. While I stood thus thinking I realized how intensely cold I was.

"Speak to me, Mr. Starwell," I said. "What is it?" My whole attitude prayed his leniency, to which he was adamant. Never had I voluntarily kissed him, or made any advance to him; now that I wished to, he seemed far away. As he might look at a dead snake he looked at me, but ignored my question. With a sickening dread of hearing his answer I asked again, in a whisper, "What is it?"

Taking something out of his pocket to hand to me he said in frigid, even tones, "Perhaps you remember writing that?"

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Pasted on thin tissue paper were the bits of the letter that I had written to Harry and had torn to pieces that morning.

As though I saw it for the first time — for certainly it carried a new import — I read it carefully :

" My dear Harry :

" According to promise I write to tell you that my whole being revolts against the idea of marrying this man. If I knew of any way to break it off I would, but, my father says I must go through with it now to save my purity from being dragged through the mire of the gossips' tongues, but —"

He reached for the letter and I gave it back to him, as he gave me another small piece of paper on which was written a few lines in pencil, to the effect that all was over between us, that his " love was dead, dead, dead as a mummy."

Poor Cupidon, love dead ! We were witness of the little fellow in his white coffin, our wedding march was droned as a funeral dirge.

It was a moment when silence alone was eloquent. We stood at a distance apart from each other ; he regarded me with an aversion that was hard to bear.

" What explanation have you to offer ? At first I decided never to see you, or to speak to you, but in justice to our past I came ; you may be able to offer

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an excuse for that," he said as he pointed a white finger at my crime that lay on the mantel.

"Gay butterfly, you have fluttered your short hour in the sun, now you shall with microscopic nicety tell us why your wings are rainbow colored feathers, instead of white icicles," I thought, and I laughed as I bowed a mock courtesy to the floor.

He drew his face out of shape in a sneer horrible to behold as he remarked with placid dignity that if he wanted a tragedy queen he would select one, but he was in search of a woman who would make him a respectable wife, only it seemed more difficult to accomplish than would at first appear possible.

Had I changed to be so ugly? What wretched thing had I become that he could turn from me in such ill-disguised disgust. I looked in the cheval glass interestedly,—my eyes were deep scintillating stars, my cheeks were blushing, and smooth as a rose, the scarlet lips parted over snow-white teeth, my dark brown hair fluffily fell in curls about the face that smiled back with a pleased satisfaction. I never looked more beautiful and I had faith in this power to beguile him.

"What do you want explained, my dear?" I said as the contemplation of myself gave a new sense of self-control and importance.

"You make it difficult for me," he said, "but before I go I want to hear from your own lips what,

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if anything, you have to say to exonerate yourself from the guilt expressed in that letter. I have paced my room in an agony trying to solve it. You have evidently listened to flattery, which is generally the destruction of most of your sex, but before we part forever, will you, can you explain that letter? If you can reassure me in any way I shall feel that to have one's name bandied about the clubs, and having dishonor heaped upon one might, even so, be of some compensation not apparent to me now. Nothing will stand the test of ridicule, yet you make me your dupe without one expressed regret. You resign me without an effort to the worst fate a proud man can possibly meet; you laughingly make of me a jilted lover. That delightful position I owe to you, the one woman in all the world before whom I have made myself an ass, a weakling, a fool. No one will respect me. They will call me a cad, and all because I loved you. Faugh!"

He turned his back upon me as if he might lay violent hands upon me if he looked at me longer.

He was finer in a rage than when limp in my arms he drawled out his everlasting devotion.

"There is positively nothing to explain," I said, relieved at this open reviling which was preferable to his silent contempt.

Like a criminal at the bar I seemed to await his sentence, feeling all the time so young in my dread

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of him and in my inadequate vocabulary. The occasion seemed to demand oratory, or spectacular elocution — glibness of some kind, and here were my pitiful commonplaces.

In a monotonous voice he said, "You sacrificed the whole of me for a whim, as you would fleck a fly off your horse; without a thought you would kick me to the dogs, yet I am not the Bluebeard that you imagine. The singing in public might have been forgiven, but you never asked that I forgive it. You never consulted me, you did things first then told me of them afterwards. That letter has given me a blow that stupefies me. I shall never forget it nor forgive it, but I came here to hear your explanation, not to upbraid you."

He stood still, speaking in such even, clear tones that he partly hypnotized me. Instinctively I knew that springtime had passed, that winter was soaring towards me.

A little seed will grow to be a tree and bear blossoms into fruitage; an evil thought will bear and expand to awful fulfillment in the world of crime. That first compelling glance with its secret wish had borne its bitter, dead-sea fruit, and I must die of it, while it had all been a matter of choice, as most things are in this world of tears.

ICILY he watched me. "Well?"

"There is nothing, but yet, it is a long story, too.

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You know about the great things I had expected to do in the future. Then we went to the wedding where Dr. Krutter took such an interest in me and advised me so strongly not to marry you. He asked me to meet him and talk it over in his study, but I never went. Everybody says that there is too much difference in our ages; but all the world could not make me doubt your goodness. You have said that you were unworthy of me but I am fathoms away your inferior. It is not that I dread marrying you so much as that I fear myself, afraid that married life such as you describe ours to be might only last through the honeymoon."

His lip curled over his white teeth as a dog's does before he bites.

"Krutter is no friend of mine; for the reason that he was seriously in love with a girl who affected me, perhaps for no other reason than to get rid of him, or, perhaps, because she did not care to marry a preacher. At any rate she took refuge in a flirtation with me. It was a rainbow affair of a day that his fierce pursuit made more interesting to both of us. With the usual pompousness of such men he took me to task for my flippant idea of woman. As I am of age, it did not occur to me that I needed a sponsor in such a contest. But that is not all?"

He looked toward me as though hoping against

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hope, as one on a raft might look who expected to see a sail.

"Surely," he went on, "a man like that could not deter your faith in one whom you have promised to marry, without a just cause?"

"No, it was not all Dr. Krutter. You know, I want to test my wings, to live the great life out in the open. I want to test these longings that after all may end in nothing. You would not wait a while, I have just left school; after so many years of life, spent in study, I want to see the world—to travel, to win applause, to—to—" and he finished my thought, "if you can do so much at nineteen, in a few years of waiting how much better can you do?" He turned his eyes away in a look of utter contempt of my weakness.

He preferred to be obtuse and not understand, and allowed me to continue in this morass of despair in which I seemed to be sinking deeper. Could he not remember my liquid, soaring voice that everyone else said was so marvelous? Could he not understand that the iron health would be apt, in marriage, to ooze away into children who would be a constant care for years? That perhaps these very children would turn out ingrates, or shiftless, if not a disgrace? Would he not be willing to save me a thin, sallow old age, or a fat greasy one, soggy with disease? Was my

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mind so impenetrable? Did he not once say that he could read me like a book?—had the book turned out to be a primer, unworthy a second glance? To be forced to throw a javelin at his egotism was embarrassing, but he, nor any other man, should ever be the Alpha and Omega of my existence (as the male always is in any happy home). My life would be rife with strange plaits that his nature could in no way find out.

We were both of us thinking what we dared not say to each other. Neither of us cared now to capitulate but he showed a different attitude toward me from that which had so degraded me when he first came that evening.

With the dew of life's morning upon her a girl was all the more charming to his ennuied curiosity because of self-sustained indifference. Because I stretched out no hand to save him he threw open the throttle valve to let his love run full speed toward me.

Somewhat encouraged by my success of a partial influence over him I continued,—“Life is too short, too inanely incomplete to spend the best part of it in squaring the chairs, keeping the clothes clean and mended; to bear children and at the same time train them,—that would be all for your sake,—seems —”

“Not worth while?” he asked.

While his manner was that of white, unflinching

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resolve personified, he gradually became listless, and I felt that I was uselessly talking to thin air.

"We have discussed this phase of it so often that, by your continued preparation at least, you convinced me that this coquetry was past — done."

My pity was aroused as my glance fell upon his haggard face, his narrow shoulders, thin legs and high, white forehead. Yet his physical nature neither expressed him morally, or mentally. That he never once showed the white feather aroused my respect for him. He was master of the situation, otherwise his power to humiliate me would have caused me to despise him. We usually do hate those whom we injure.

He looked into my eyes, so soft and childishly chaste, and felt convinced against his will of an innocence so true that I did not feel the necessity of boasting about it, as false women always do. His minatory despair was somewhat appeased at this. His surely was the triumph. I was the sawdust doll whom he had expected to find quickened with loving fire,— he would sweep me into the dustpan of his past to be forgotten with the rest of the rubbish. This was not meagerly mortifying.

"I have a few letters of yours," I said, to fill up the silence (in my reading of such cases women generally made this remark in a lull of hair-tearing).

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"Yes," he answered, retaining his apathetic glare, "and here are yours."

To hide how bitterly this nonchalance stung me I hurried out of the room to obtain the letters, those of his that he had written to me.

"The face of the world is changed I think
Since first I heard the footsteps of thy soul."

Returning to the room I found Mr. Starwell standing by the hearth. When handing him the sacred packet, he did not see me, absorbed as he was; he stood like a stone image, motionless.

With one hand on his shoulder, creepingly, fearfully, I gently placed the precious packet in his limp fingers.

As a child will throw away a dead bee that has stung him he flung them from his hand toward the dying fire. This seemed an exertion beyond his strength and he sank into a chair.

Suddenly from out the ashes sprang into life the word "love." It flickered and danced all about the room. I turned; it was actually enamelled in opalescent colors of flame. The hearth was alive with the word "love." Many sentences stood out in bold relief such as, "I shall love you forever," "breathe your name with my dying breath."

The almost human sensitiveness of the paper writhed and curled over its doom in the devouring flame.

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With a loud cry, as though this was cruelty that scorched my heart, I snatched the remains of this holy cremation and held a few of his unharmed letters to my breast a moment as I panted violently, then fell on the floor in a heap at his feet, with my head on his hard knee.

This moment revealed something to me of the difference between the fullness of days with love crowding them merrily to overflowing joy, with sweet warm life, with inspiration that can sanctify mean things in daily routine, and the hard emptiness of long dreary machine-made life, a life ground out to suit a pattern of ambition that brings only loveless uselessness. In a flash of cognition well known to magnetic beings, I saw a long waste of weary, pitiless years, then all was black.

It seemed a week afterwards that he was handing me a large cool handkerchief that felt so dry and comforting, in place of the tiny wet embroidered one with which I sopped up my tears as I tried to get the strands of hair off my fiery cheeks.

Daring to look up, my arms wound round his neck, my longing eyes met his inexorable face. He now looked at me with a half-melting expression, as his cool fingers closed on my hot eyelids.

"If I had known you loved me like this," and he carefully lifted me to my feet and guided me tenderly to the sofa, as one will take care of an invalid.

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"Do you love me so, dearest?" he murmured as he gently sought my lips in a kiss that we forgot could ever cease, while we embraced.

The warm, soft contact of my body had always been irresistibly magnetic to him but to-night it was almost a deliriant. His arms clasped my waist as if he would keep me to him always.

I have yet to meet such fierce passion with so perfect a self-control. My own innocence was perhaps my strongest safeguard.

"Dearest, let me go."

Gently, gradually releasing me, we stood looking at each other. The triumph of my awakened heart, the surety that he still hungered for my languorous lips, that my love could never satiate him was indeed sweet to know.

The window shade had been up all the time. Someone lighted a light in the upper room next door. A man turned away from the window. "He has, no doubt, been watching us," he said excitedly as he looked at the window.

"No matter," I said, "but you must go; it is now striking two o'clock," and he left me after promising to come next evening and take me to the theatre.

Sybarite natures easily form a habit of liking good things. This love and these kisses seemed as necessary to me now as sun is to the rose, or as spice is to cake,—and youth will have its innings.

CHAPTER XII

*"If only this green world might last forever,
And love be love, and wine be wine forever,
Eternal Rose of the Eternal Spring!
Would that mine eyes might burn in thee forever."*

PPROMPTLY at the hour that we had appointed Mr. Starwell came in a carriage to take me to a play, which, in summer, is at best tiresome in its flippancy, and on this particular evening, this memorable, white night it seemed as if my lover took me (on trial for my life) to the worst possible excuse for a play. Never again could the theatre seem so ghastly stupid. The cheap tinsel, the clashing music, poor jokes and painted faces, the paper trees, all represented only too vividly the seamy side of the theatrical life that heretofore had presented such an alluring front. It seemed that my life had been lived with my youth gone, and that this was a fit representation of all that life now meant.

We sat in our red plush chairs thinking of the drama we were playing rather than the one on the mimic stage. Had we been bidden to a feast where



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nothing but the crumbs remained? As the curtain went down on the second act we both desired to leave the place.

He expected me to explain, and reiterated that it was "my duty to him" until fear and dread possessed me. With my promise to make clear everything to him as yet in the dark he became morosely silent. There seemed to be no veil to throw over my falsity and weakness. All that one could say now would seem as nothing. Wouldn't it all be palpable nonsense to anyone looking on? And for fear of tears I tried to laugh. If he did not believe in my innocence, why did he not act? But ignorance and innocence wrote my fate on the wall.

"There is nothing to explain, it is altogether silly. Worried about your fear of my going upon the stage, it seemed to me that you were straining the point and in a high tension mood, without thinking or knowing, something within me made me write that letter. That's all."

With my tightly clenched hands in my lap, looking out at the street lamps and familiar things that used to look so lovely on these return trips from the theatre and that now were so very commonplace, I thought if a lover's quarrel could change the world so much what would married life do for me?

Could anything be said now that would alter the situation? Would either of us want it any other

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way now? Words would only be sheer nonsense. He reached out no hand to save me, nor offered any excuse or palliation. Timidly the words came, for I must learn what he thought of me. "What do you believe me guilty of?"

"You have no doubt listened to flattery, and I have lost all confidence in you."

"Then all is lost," I cried, in a panic of awful shame and it flashed upon me in quick hot waves that burned my flesh as he implied in that cold, calculating way that my honor was blackened, if in his own mind it had not been destroyed.

With trembling fingers I hurriedly, as though I could not escape fast enough, opened the carriage door, gathered up my train and rushed to the house alone, as if he was following me with murderous intent. Was this, could this be his interpretation of my folly?

The front door of the house stood open. It seemed to me it would have been impossible for me to have opened it with my shaking fingers and blind eyes. I closed it hurriedly while in my confused brain a thousand thoughts swirled and fought together, and grew into a terrible conviction that something was outside that portal which would be an everlasting pursuing evil to my last day on earth.

With my hands on my breast to still the loud pounding of my heart, I drew the curtain aside to look out of the window. The street was empty. A distant

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clatter of hoofs; then, deathly stillness. The street lamps flickered; the dark houses, the plain black pall of sky without a star or moon. Ah, God! Could eternal sleep adjust the wrong or excuse this new condition? Or build again what had been destroyed? Or could Providence redeem me from further crime — for had not my silly heart forever marred one man's happiness.

A restless, dreamless sleep was ended at four o'clock by the noisy chatter of sparrows. They seemed, even in their bird language, to be pitilessly mocking me. Anything would be better than to be alone with my own thoughts, so, dressing myself, I went out and walked for hours, returning at seven o'clock, exhausted, but convinced of the truth of the hard lesson that one's own folly is the worst lash to a poor fool's silly hide, and that in life compensation and retribution are the balances in the scales of all our living. "Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin"—and the writing on the wall was interpreted to mean that a woman shall be just or pay the indemnity.

* * * * *

That the quarrel was patched up neither exhilarated or depressed the individuals who were obliged to live through the discomforting details that such a contretemps generally inflicts upon those in the lover's entourage, but when the episode was recited to them with the conflicting testimony that any report obtains

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by repetition, the scant politeness and half respect shown toward me was in no sense conducive to conceit, or self content.

All who thought they could ride me with a gag bit when the inevitable time came would be thrown a cropper, I thought. Now they came to their feet expressing dismay. Contempt for myself did not altogether eradicate a secret satisfaction far off in the dim corners of my heart where no one was ever permitted to enter, that I still had the whip-hand, and this was the golden opportunity to show that I had the "pull" over them. If my case was not won now, then,—surely:

"You've gambled deep as Lucifer
And won the morning star."

For nothing daunted my utter belief in my own capabilities or great future.

"Poor Kate," wept my gentle, loving, home-keeping mother, who with a strange quiet complacency stretched herself on the nearest divan and gave herself to the luxury of tears. "Tell me again, for I don't understand."

"Again," shouted my father, in an impotent rage. "Again, what do you want to hear such stuff a second time for? Don't you recognize the fact that the world will spit upon her, and that the boys at the club will all consider her euchred? This man will



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not keep this story a secret. He believes she has a lover, that she has given herself to this monkey, and that she has only delighted Starwell with her promise of marriage for the sake of the wealth and social position she would command as his wife, while her heart was given to this other man, and that he has found her out. Her name will be dragged through the mud of the gossips' mouths. A fine thing, indeed, for a young girl."

Then turning to me he said: "You say you are not afraid of anything, why in the devil didn't you call for help when he took that letter off your desk? Or why didn't you shoot him, or get a policeman to arrest him when he had something of yours? A bad woman would have guarded such a letter with her life. One proof, if I had to have proof of your innocence in the whole matter, is the cold way you stand there, as if you had only asked for the wrong piece of pie and could change it.

"Damn it! Can't you see you have wrecked your whole future? What in the devil is there to a woman if she hasn't that something in her which inspires confidence that a man can bet on every time? I wouldn't give a damn for a woman without that, not a damn!" and he pounded a heavy, determined fist upon the table as he assumed a meditative mood which always capped the climax of suffering of any unusual outburst from him.

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The moment seemed opportune to make some excuse for myself, and I said: "I was not myself, I did not know why I did it; he would not listen to me or give it back, that was all."

"All!" The inflection my father put upon that word silenced me. There were times when my actions were strange even to myself and they often brought ignominious words to my hearing. "I don't believe, Kate, that you are quite right."

As we look over the years how many things have been exactly as we wanted them or as we would have had them done now? Why can we never hold and keep our pet toy a moment longer? How quickly the paint and glue show their shallow disposition and frustrate our well laid plans to foster them and make them eternal!

The destruction of an empire would be a small loss to a man of my father's type, but he would prefer death to the vaguest suggestion that a woman who belonged to him should cause a breath of suspicion to tarnish her fair name. For this shame to go unchallenged would be impossible to him, and the worst of all sufferings.

It was ignoble in me to care so little for the feelings of these two people who would sacrifice their lives for my happiness. It seemed almost like robbing them of some treasure that never could be replaced. Life or death, whatever came or whatever



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must be; henceforth one thing was certain, there were no shackles in sight to be put upon my freedom, except, perhaps, those of disgrace and the misery of those dearest to me. Now, I was as one who watches the close view of a city's chimney pots as compared to the great limitless ocean just beyond, out of which was soon to rise hope and peace. Ah, liberty!

Could man or woman ask more?



CHAPTER XIII

*"We shall change as the things that we cherish,
Shall fade, as they fade before,
As foam upon water shall perish,
As sands upon the shore."*

THE seventh of June was to be the day of our marriage; that holy celebration of a moment when a young girl has rounded her joyous circle of girlhood, to enter the new life that she believes is to make her happiness and to lift her to the seventh Heaven, that acme of every woman's hopes — an ideal marriage.

The honeymoon is eagerly anticipated. The bride-elect compares her future with her present, when everyone gratifies her every wish. Instead of this great white splendor of a bridal fête, here I sat in the dark, alone, philosophizing on how easily some women will sever a tie that ought to be, but rarely is, considered sacred. To-night I should have been resplendent in my white dress and pearls, with worshipful friends crowding about me, making me

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a queen,—with faith,. and good will. But instead I was sitting alone.

All the world loves a lover. This had been proven to me; for all the world had paid homage to me. Now, only the outlook of spinsterhood and hard-headed good sense was left to me. The other prospect was a white, beautiful dream that became a chimera.

While thus soliloquizing the maid knocked on my door and announced Mr. Starwell.

Without waiting to more than cast a passing glance in my mirror I descended to the parlor, wondering what could be his errand.

Mr. Starwell had come on horseback, and he asked me if I did not want to take a short ride with him, suggesting that I would have time to put on my habit while my horse was being saddled. His excuse for our outing was that he had to go to the house he had rented on a matter of business.

Finally, we were riding our horses along the dusty back streets of a city that now seemed ugly and abhorrent to me and my thought was, if only some awful catastrophe would swallow me bodily and relieve me from myself. Glances of derision were given me by my friends. Perhaps I deserved the suspicion of the man beside me, not to mention the distrust of my father, and the worse than indifference of my mother. The general outlook of life was now

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only waste and failure where all had been high hopes.

Mr. Starwell, with the excuse of an errand to "our" house, wanted to elicit from me some desire to see what sort of a home he had wished to provide for me; but he was entirely disappointed in his plan; for I allowed him to go into the house alone. A hand-organ on the next block was playing popular airs, to which I listlessly listened. The heat was oppressive, with a dead sultriness as when the trees, with their leaves drooping in the parched, dusty air fairly send out more heat instead of coolness to a languorous, withered world.

At last with great relief I heard voices at the top of the long flight of steps and as they came nearer I caught the words, "Oh, Mr. Starwell, we think it a dove-cote and shall be very happy to take as long a lease as you will give us."

They stood looking into the street, the woman leaning toward the man with her hand on his shoulder, in the unmistakable attitude of the newly-wed, but seeing me she darted back into the house. Something about this made it significant to me.

"When breast to breast we clung, even I, and she,
A spirit, when her spirit looked through me,
A God, when all our life breath met to fan
Our life, beloved, till love's emulous ardor ran
Fire within fire,— desire in deity."

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Soon we rode away in silence. People lined the steps of the houses; neighbors were talking in low tones to each other, while a few children played in the street. The moon was silvering everything with soft, magic light.

We came to a narrow road shaded by great overhanging willow trees. As if of their own accord the horses stopped, close together. Without a word my lover clasped me close about the waist, saying, as our lips met, "for the last time."

We rode on in silence. He felt that the mystery about it was deeper than ever and would never be revealed. His future had been laid on the knees of the gods. He would never again wear the gem of faith. Finally our horses walked up the path to the house, where his "good night" to me was as of one stranger to another.

When alone, I stood a long while in the dim moonlight. A new way was made visible, opening on a tortuous path, hard and terrible and not altogether innocent, where the orchestral harmonies of a safe married life would be replaced by the hand-organ jingles of everyday commonplace. As in a vision I saw that a dream is not always a fulfillment.

As I lingeringly went up the steps to the porch, my father's eyes fairly glistened, hawk-like, in the darkness, where his alert eagerness could be felt rather

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than seen, as he asked much about the things he wanted to know in the one word, "Well!"

Cold shivers crept over me as I remembered the silent ride, unproductive of any change. "There is nothing. Everything is just the same. We have parted, this time, I suppose, forever."

The words brought to me the sense that my lot would now be different from anything I had ever expected. This would be a new page upon which would be read ruthless sarcasm from women, biting criticism, laid sizzling hot in the open wound of my heart, and I should have to face it all alone, without a murmur or a regret.

Mr. Starwell had tried to encourage me, had been almost the lover as he stopped the slowly walking horses by a touch, and had kissed me gently, plaintively, and had laid his hand on my horse's mane as he whispered, "I would like to buy this horse from you"; and as the two horses put their noses together, — who can tell but they felt the spirit of our long farewell in the faintly gleaming moonlit air, as the leaves, or the great silence whispered — of what?

Though my lover once, would he now substitute himself my hater, as is often the case when a vehement adorer, who has once vowed himself, changes his mood?

I went upstairs to put on a cool gown,—I had

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expected to gain happiness with freedom, but it did not seem to come as buoyantly and quickly as expected; some way, it did not seem that real, true, light-hearted happiness would ever be for me, who showed herself to be naturally a turncoat and a deceiver.

Mr. Starwell's deportment might have been described by his pet word "elegant"; subtly refined, he abhorred the excessive. He walked with stately tread the path of severe conventionality, anyone differing with him forfeited his respect.

He had made love by rote,—surely offense enough to a silly, romantic girl whose type of man was a stage hero.

As a teacher expounding a new rule of arithmetic he had taught me my inexperience. In all his actions my lover had showed a suspicious lack of confidence in me that no effort of mine had been able to change or cure. My supreme innocence was one drawback to his knowledge of me in this situation; for I knew no more of the world and its popular vices than a Hottentot does of God, or a smelling bottle. As yet the freedom of youth had not drilled me to know that conventionality is a veil for vice and not always, as I had supposed, a bulwark of virtue.

The world, filled as it is with evil minded, doubting Thomases, can never be happy, and the worst of it is that the higher we go up in the social scale the more of those we find who will never give credit for



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more than can be seen. The physical eye is adjusted only to see the physical, and society has little time for the sensitive cultivation of the purely spiritual side of our nature; with raised eyebrows and pointed finger it asks: "Why does he eat with publicans and sinners?" not recognizing the fact that its own sinful selfishness may be looked upon as the worst crime of all. Its ridiculous finery and excessive wealth lavished on trifles, in comparison to its cheap gossip, and tawdry soul, makes the "other half" smile, not in derision, but in pity.

With these thoughts seething in my childish brain I went to the 'spare room,' where my brocade, pearl-sewn wedding-dress and veil lay in silent, white mockery. I kissed the train of this symbol as I knelt beside it, wetting it with my tears; and, feeling conscious of my utter helplessness, I asked God to give me guidance in this dire doubt and misery.

CHAPTER XIV

*"Love comes unseen, we only see it go,
None but death loves the lips by love forsaken.*

* * * * *

*Youth like a magic bird has flown away.
He sang a little morning hour in May,
Sang to the Rose his love, that is gone,
Whither, is more than you or I can say."*

LOOKING about over the broad, empty plain in the center of which I seemed to myself now to stand, I reveled in the fact that my energy was in no way diminished by the exhausting experiences I had just passed through. Much of the poetical idealism of my nature had been ravelled out, but the idea of idle hands or brain was impossible to me.

While the stage was to be my ultimate life work, my mother needed too much of my attention now for me to think of it immediately. She needed encouragement mentally, morally and physically, which I felt I was alone able to give, but this was not enough for my beleaguered soul.

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The thing nearest to hand was the poor, that easy commodity that we have always with us.

My work among the poor foreigners showed me that they possessed all the vices, without any of the redeeming qualities of the rich. They were mostly socialistic in their views, in the lowest sense, trying to break down what had already been built that they might finally stand where the men stood whom they had reviled. Braggart, ignorant, self-opinionated, the work done for them was neither understood nor appreciated. They took the unselfish devotion to a cause for the betterment of mankind to be a sort of self-aggrandizement and self-exhibition, if not altogether a means for commercial advertisement and comparison. The wheel slid back as far as it went up hill, and settlement workers rather prided themselves on the spectacle they made in showing what small results might accrue from a mighty effort.

"God help the rich, the poor can beg," became a retaliatory war cry in place of my former craze that only the poor were in need of the missionary.

Seeing a pretty, furbelowed woman driving alone in a victoria no longer seemed the keen injustice that once I had felt it to be against some sane, poor woman with a dirty brat in her arms. The world would never change on account of a few illusionists without enough stamina to say how disheartening was the conflict of poverty against the rich. The richest man

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in this country had once been the poorest — Ah, bah!

What joy, or pain, or friend, or anything that our lichen hearts attach to but passes or fades! Sphinxes, crêpe, withered flowers filled the earth with their symbols, yet the wheels had not rolled over my joyous heart to teach it the lesson of humility. I was, however, beginning to see that human nature surpasses all things for weakness.

A thing that is not evil must be good. Would I not fulfill a mission by educating myself, spending my time in reading, singing, and entertaining my family?

One night, while lolling in the hammock gazing at the moon, wondering about it all and the use of anything in the world, a childhood friend, Clyde Gallaway, in passing saw me and came up on the porch.

His appearance always presaged a lot of new gossip, as sure as the east wind brings the rain. After the usual budget had been delivered he suddenly asked me: "Ironclad, why don't you marry?"

"Because I don't wish to."

"Every woman wishes to marry, you don't want to be an old maid, do you?"

"You speak with the conviction of a quack doctor whose medicine purports to cure all ills. I simply won't marry till I can't help myself, and that will be



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some time hence, unless the world breeds different men from those on my docket."

"But the men are as good as the women will let them be."

"There, Clyde, that will do; you have one of the beauties of youth at least, a brutal candor, but it can never harm me; whether young or old, men are all the same, and will forever remain so in some respects. Until you are eighty your mind on the subject of women will wear knee pants. A woman lays in a moth-eaten moral dotage, with her false teeth and rouge pots, when a man sheds his eaton jackets and smokes his first cigarette. You are friend enough to endure my candor, as I do yours."

"Oh, Ironclad, I did not mean any harm," humbly apologized the boy, "but to think of a girl with your eyes, the curves of your mouth, with your figure, your mind, ah! what a wife and mother you would make! A woman really isn't anybody till she is married. With a baby's arm around your neck you would begin to learn what disinterested love is like, above all, what it is worth," he said as he stretched his hand toward the hammock.

"Your views are all one-sided, Clyde. I suppose you cannot feel that they are if you can only believe that love is all a delusion, that man is simply endowed with this instinct that you call love by his creator,—who describes himself as a jealous God — who com-

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mands His creatures to go and create more of their kind. You simply obey a command of the higher power to a lower. Don't eulogize love, as you call it, to me if you want to sit here and keep me company in this glorious moonlight. Let us talk of something more uplifting."

"Nonsense," persisted my young neophyte, lately engaged, "you will make a slave of yourself to the man when he finally appears, for there is always and ever will be a man who is loved in the life of a woman like you.

"All the fellows adore you," he went on as I hummed a tune to myself and he gently swayed the hammock back and forth, "but you are so deuced clever at making enemies, you do take people's heads off most unmercifully. A few of the lads at the club, — but then they are not gentlemen, of course, and no one pays any attention to them, — go about scattering their rascally tales about you."

"It is well to cause comment of some kind, rather than to be an insipid ninny," I retorted.

"But can't you fall in love; don't you want to marry?"

"Oh, Clyde! There are other things more important to me."

"There is nothing in life more important than love. It is life itself to me," replied the boy.

He spoke in a whisper, it was all so sacred to him.

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I dared not topple over his little snow doll too brusquely; the fiery sun of experience would destroy it soon enough.

"Most women of your age have been in love. If you had you would not talk as you do. To think of your wonderful magnetism, your positive virtue; to have built up a character as you have, in spite of everything, when it has been against fearful odds, I know. Oh! you must marry!"

"If you will give me a sufficient reason, I will consider it. Many of the women in our set use marriage as a cloak to a life they could not otherwise lead, but that or any other side of it does not appeal to my reason. This perfect health of mine has never known a break, my body never has known fatigue, my spirit is naturally lovely. One potent reason I would have for marrying would be to enrich myself in order to have a few schemes promulgated that are unpracticable for want of money, when I might be able to discover if there is any law wiser, or more satisfying to ourselves than that we should love our neighbor as ourselves."

"Yes, but if you marry a rich man he will either be an old crank, or a young fool; in either case take care that you get the money. A man of vast wealth is not generally lovable, and if you marry one, society would condemn you."

"Oh, no, Clyde, society is never averse to the man

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or woman with money; it is the staple product upon which all other considerations are based. It is one of nature's fine equations. Perhaps there is too much social freedom rampant in the air."

A groan of dissent, with a sympathetic squeeze of the hand, did not prevent me from rattling on in a whirl of involuntary impetus: "Nobody knows what love is, except that it is the foundation of the family. Love is the lever of the world, the mainspring of humanity. So, aside from any ambition or craving to enhance the beauty of living, or a desire for doing the heroics that good may accrue, it is now my conviction that marriage is the primary fundamental step. The heart and soul long for a completion in their psychic evolution that can never be wrought out alone. Everything testifies to the inane futility of any attempt to reform the world by one sex alone."

Clyde's wrapt attention encouraged me to continue.

"Female intuitive finesse and fancy may lead the male brute who inhabits the earth with life to his best accomplishments and doughty deeds."

"Love reads peace and happiness. There would be nothing in the world lovely or beautiful without the divine teaching that 'The greatest of these is Love,'" he interposed.

"But, Clyde, no one has offered me this pure, unleavened bread; instead, men thrust their swelter-

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ing passions upon me, to consume me for their own gratification. It is tiresome waiting for an affinity. I might now wear a crown made of engagement rings if an old-fashioned, puritanical conscience had not interfered. To Balzac's twenty reasons for marrying I might add a few more. His list is as follows; if you have time to hear," and, as I had just read them I counted them over on my fingers:

" 'First — Ambition,

" 'Then — Goodness — to tear a girl from a tyrannical family,

" 'Maybe — Anger — to disinherit the collaterals.

" 'Perhaps — Disdain — of an unfaithful mistress.

" 'Probably — Ennui — of the bachelor life.

" 'It has been a — Bet — as in Lord Byron's case.

" 'Or for — Honor —

" 'Very often it is — Interest' — but this is nearly always so he adds."

"Oh, Ironclad, do stop —"

" 'Or it may be — Youth — coming out of college one is giddy.

" 'Or — Plainness — fearing lack of another opportunity.

" 'In France — Machiavelism — to quickly inherit from a relative.

" 'In England or Germany — Necessity — to give an estate to an heir.

" 'Or — Obligation — on account of feeble health.

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" 'Or youthful Passion — in order to cure it.' — Never!

" 'Or a widow and her lawyer Quarrel — to finish a law suit.

" 'Or — Gratitude — so as to give more than we have received.

" 'Among middle aged — for Wisdom — as something suggested to theorists.

" 'Or — A will — when an uncle dies leaving money.

" 'Or — Custom — an imitation of our grandfathers.' — Bosh!

" 'Or — Old age — to make a good finish.' — Bosh!

" 'Or — Zeal — to guard against committing sin.'

" Besides this formidable array of reasons for marriage your little one of love looks rather puny, don't you think so? A friend of mine, who is an analyst, describes love as a disease."

Clyde was a good audience to practice upon. I felt like giving a dissertation upon a topic and thoughts that now were a part of my daily life, so I continued:

" Maybe, according to that, my health is too good. Love may be the effect of an overfed nicety with those who live on the heights, in the fragrant, uncontaminated air of an assured social position, who have never suffered the pangs of starvation, never walked the streets in shabby clothes looking for work; never been sick in a vile smelling room, or one full of moral

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disorder, cramping its inmates in every fibre of their being with that dragging perverseness so aggravating and degrading to human nature.

"Poverty, that keeps one's soul mortgaged to a rich corporation with every pulse throb belonging to the man who pays. When he cannot eat a meal, take a Sunday stroll, or give the baby a toy without that one idea, that ever hammering truth, pounding the throttle valve that drives one mad with its everlasting din."

"Where did you learn that speech? You are a great orator," mildly suggested Clyde in his boyish admiration.

"Then, there is the man who must wear the ball and chain for an inherited sin, the stigma upon one where the sins of the fathers are visited upon the children, where the taint of blood, the curse of idleness, or the bodily sweat of toiling ignorance is as much a part of him as the color and profound mechanism of his eyes.

"We may not be blamed for not understanding a problem that has never been tabulated in our conscience, but shall we forever be held unaccountable to the dire fact that we ignore the men below, the toiling, moiling, sweating, suffering slaves of our galley-boat, that we may loll at ease on a sea of calm credulity where all is well, because we, forsooth, are conscienceless. The earth groans, the air is poisoned,

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water runs filth, and lives must be crushed under that we may stand at ease, arrayed in the best that the world can bestow? People talk of love when they mean money, money, money! The coin can convert to its following more souls than any religion, science or creed."

"You don't really believe that," pleaded Clyde.

"When I get money, I shall find out whether my fine ideas about the poor are point-lace affairs to be talked of at women's clubs or a practical, iron crow-bar that will crush out a horror or two, as it prods it forth. The sight of their husbands is a cure when I envy women their children and wealth.

"The monotonous humdrum of married life is its great bane — then look at what it leads to. Sociologists do not ascribe polygamy alone to the Turk and the Mormon.

"The old maid's life is filled with constant change. She wanders at will over beflowered valleys of pleasure, roves the mountains of ambition, so weird and wild, or plods through the hot deserts on to loneliness. The life at least never spells ennui, as yours will after six months of marriage, when you can be caught at the club, or in the coulisse of a theatre instead of wifey's arms.

"The cap sheaf of all things is liberty. Married people all insinuate that it is at least, and give the impression that it is unattainable for them.

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"I am perfectly happy. Do you know of another woman with a sweeter temper?"

We both laughed. The tension we had been under was broken.

Clyde made a new effort to proselyte me in a question which was meant to answer mine:

"Which Hell-gate in the Inferno did Dante dedicate to the celibate? And yet they say you have loved. Of all your '*affaires du cœur*' the last two were the most startling."

"You listen to rumor, which is bad."

But Clyde hurriedly said: "Dame Rumor is not always a liar, and she said that you were engaged to a boy of eighteen and a man of seventy-five at the same time."

"Old Dame Rumor is half a prig, but, like all lies, there is a grain of truth at the foundation of this, for I really enjoy flirting, as some people like good food or horse racing. With youth one can have a jolly, rejuvenating experience that is a tonic to the nerves, while old age levels our too buoyant spirits, as it increases our judgment and leads us to thoughtfulness. It takes either extreme to really flatter a woman, while an 'eligible' of middle age courts a woman from egotism; she flatters him; it is a vanity for both of them."

"While you are flippant, you do not laugh at the sanctity of the home or the family, do you?" sol-

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emly asked Clyde. "Isn't it sacred to your mind? What would the world be without such an institution? You, if you ever loved a man, would cook his dinner with devotion and preserve his home with your life."

"You pin me down to logarithms. Perhaps it is solvent upon us that we need a new Moses to pound the Decalogue at us and point us to serpents cropping out of dead branches, and that the American and French women need to multiply more, that the hearth may have a live coal of grace added to its dead ashes of Gomorrah.

"Women and royalty need never make excuses. Do not expect me to bend the knee. This moonlight is so soft, and the air is so lulling it is too bad you don't take advantage of the *mise en scène* and show me how you make love."

"You don't seem to remember that I am soon to be married. But, tell me about those two men and how you entangled yourself in your flirtations with them."

"You are peevish, Clyde, even God could not pin the Devil down to anything, and I, a daughter of the Devil, must repeat the old proverb—'like father, like child.' Some of the red has gotten daubed into me. It was all part of the pattern of my life, one of the inevitable fatal coincidences.

"A boy of seventeen or eighteen, just escaped from

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the confinement of his college year, finds in a woman a trifle older than he, first, friend, then mother, sister, and finally love, his apotheosis. The young man to the 'old maid' has all the candor, the aplomb, the fresh buoyancy that fairly entices one to swim out in the breezy, cool open of unconventionalism.

"Jack Forester offered me the bud and blossom of his first, equivocal love, and it was to me like the marron glacé habit, hard to acquire, but impossible to stop. It was so newly, so deliciously sincere.

"We met the summer that Papa and I went to Nantucket, because Papa did not want to be foozeled by any racket, so we lived quietly as clams, went to bed with the last round of the town crier, and adapted our moods and modes to the place, at perfect peace with nature—which at Nantucket means sand and a dozen or two scrub oaks, with the limitless sea everywhere to look at. We encouraged no longings for the world or its rasping noise or vulgar markets. My whole being was swept clean of the grossness that is the groundwork for a society leader.

"This content was interesting. It cleared away all sordidness till it left the soul with a pure emptiness that is true Nirvana.

"One day, lying on my back, serenely imbedded in the white sand, with a big green sunshade over me, in heavenly oblivion of everything earthly, and looking up at the blue sky that met the deep colored run

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of the turquoise sea in a perfect bowl interrupted by a single sail, my dream was shattered by some one lifting my umbrella, and Minerva Mills laughed in my face.

"Then, such a clatter of talk, whew! Minerva would talk to a wild zebra, especially if she ever got on that subject of Isaac Snow, who has been her 'best friend' for twenty years. All that time she has been regaled by him, and he has become a victim to the habit. She talks of him in a much kinder way than if he were her husband. So was my sweet oblivion all gone.

"'The smell of blood came to the tame tiger when he ate up his master.' Minerva was all dances and clothes. She reeked with tales of wildest hue about things and people.

"Clay vessels will walk if animated with desire and my soul now longed for the fleshpots of Egypt, but there was my promise to poor Papa, who needed the rest.

"I invited Minerva to dine with us that night, and she mumbled something unintelligible about a young boy she wanted to bring with her, which I accepted without comment.

"But, when Minerva came with this youngster under her arm, in all seriousness, it was too ludicrous for me, and I made a deliberate dead set at him with love, from the tip of my red suede shoe to the red

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rose in my hair, and to which he responded. Minerva was all at sea at the game, which only made it more interesting, though the boy was a bagatelle not worth considering in our love battle.

"There is something about a young person, a real young person, that is quite irresistible. I mean the very young person who does not try to interpose his ego, and the culpable fact of dyed hair, false teeth and a battered-up something, which he presents on a velvet cushion, surrounded with diamonds, and labeled with a printed placard to show that 'this is my heart.' An unsightly thing upon close inspection; a falcon plaything of a thousand intrigues, with its feathers all trailing.

"It was not entirely owing to the pink lamp shades that Papa's face flushed, for he really enjoyed himself, and I blessed Jack in my heart. We all laughed till we were sick at the antics and jokes of that boy, just beginning his school vacation. Jack must have had *pousse café* in his milk bottle at teething time from the knowing way in which he talked to Papa about his wines. The evening was a mild bacchanal that was the off-break for each of us.

"Papa surprised us all by inviting him to go with us on the yacht the next day. He came at the minute of ten, 'au rigueur,' with the manner of a society veteran.

"A senior girl is inclined to book a junior man



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in the third-class passage in her railroad of love. She treats him with badinage and the lighter whipped creams of her fancy, but Jack insisted on being first-class, and was booked so.

"After all, friendship is a century plant that blooms once in a hundred years for a few hours.

"We spent the day together on the yacht quite alone; for Papa stayed below, or walked on the forward deck, occasionally coming to speak to us in an abstracted way — so we lapsed to light talk with nothing worse than deep, sea draught kisses, that, however, were to be an epoch in my life.

"We slowly sailed into our landing at nightfall and the supreme beauty impelled us to a quiet that was not broken till we reached the house. The crescent moon, the still water, salty air; the twinkling lights along the shore and the fragrant gardens made a romantic composite whole that never before, nor since, so truly permeated my whole being.

"Partly owing to the suggestion of unuttered things I was silent. It was an anniversary with but little qualification in its bitterness. A year ago the same moon saw me bidding farewell to a man who was then my best friend. I believe that my heart died within me that night; but I have talked too long, Clyde, and you must be weary and anxious to go. Shall we say good-night?"

"No, I can stay on to hear the rest, tell me; for there

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were all sorts of bad stories about that first engagement of yours. Were you in love with him?"

"Clyde," I asked, "if you had a dead baby would you want to take it out of the vault to talk to it every day?"

This hushed him, and he asked me no more questions, so I continued: "One day Jack and I went bluefishing with an old salt who must have piloted the Ark, and some of the elderly lady barnacles on the hotel piazza, through a field glass, saw Jack kissing me; so that was another straw that broke the camel's back. Jack talked of love so glibly that a practiced connoisseur would not have listed him among the innocents. Laughing at him only made his leach heartstrings cling all the closer to mine.

"Toward the close of the season, the day before we were to leave for home, Jack appeared with a long face. That he had flunked in his 'exams.' for the coming college year, played his money, or had been cut off in his allowance, were the first excuses that came to my mind, but, as he sprawled on the sofa he said in a sepulchral voice: 'You are going away.'

"'You ought to be spanked,' I laughed. 'Well, you are to return to school—'

"'Never,' he fairly shouted. 'You must marry me; here is a ring, I pawned my watch to buy it; take it or I will throw it out of the window. Oh, dearest.'

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"Then he began coaxing me while I went on packing a trunk. He was determined, he said, to marry the only perfect woman in the world — meaning me. No one would have recognized me from Jack's mellifluous description. He smothered me in bouquets and burned incense until I almost lost a heterodox belief in myself through inhaling the fumes. He was so intense he was fearful.

"Next day, when I was safely seated opposite to Papa in the train, his sharp eye caught sight of the solitaire ring on my finger. I squirmed with mortification. 'He said he would drown himself, or throw the ring out of the window,' I explained.

"Papa at first blamed me, then laughed as I told him my plan of writing a letter to break it off. Subterfuge is a woman's privilege, because at times it is her only defense.

"Time passed, the holidays were drawing near and Jack would be coming home for his vacation. I dreaded the ordeal, but went through it bravely, of writing a long, lovely letter to him. It was wicked to break the boy's heart, everyone would censure me."

"No one censures a woman for anything that she does to a man," interrupted Clyde.

"The note was ready to mail when the maid handed me a letter in the well-known handwriting. I would read the missive before mailing mine — it was to the effect that he loved another girl, whom he would

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marry in a year, but he begged for my blessing and added a postscript, saying, 'Would I please send the ring back.'

"Thus, Clyde, endeth this story. You must be tired of it all by this time." He thanked me while he avowed that it was believable and simple. He always trusted me, he said.

We were silent till a pressure of Clyde's hands and his question, "The other?"

"As for the other; all old men like me for the youth that I express and for the womanhood I represent for the future. He asked me to share his millions in exchange for my time, youth and gayety. It looked like an even enough bargain until he kissed me, when I stood revealed to myself. The animalism in me was stronger than my avarice; Jack's burning kiss and fervent desire far outweighed the old man's gold in my heart. I had not been born again; the same everlasting fires were not to be quenched.

"Now, Clyde, good-night. You make me think that you are really interested in my defections."

"You will never know how indifferent you have been to me," he said, as he pressed my hand to his lips, then said "Good-night" in a solemn tone that conveyed his sincerity. "Do not put it all in a book, for you would write the worst of yourself. Let me give you a few notes that will really represent your true, lovely self — not this part that you have just related."

CHAPTER XV

"Better to be a crystal, and be broken, than to be a tile upon the housetop to remain."—Yoshida Snoin.

SO society had taken up the cudgel against me, and Clyde had mildly hinted at the attitude of the men at the club, men mostly with their "Annettas," "Dollys" and "Sallies" in their "petite apartment" around the corner from their permanent address on their wife's visiting card. Society was then to take me with tongs, if at all, as a girl who had been jilted by her lover—a chit of a girl who was her own chaperon and major domo.

Gossips flared the inquisition of their lorgnettes upon me, as men eyed me while they talked in low tones. They chose to belittle me; I chose to ignore their intentions. They were all unnecessary to me. They depended upon their skill in tactics but reckoned without a knowledge of a character that dies fighting, that knows nothing of retreat. This attitude of society put red hot irons into my heart, plucked at my vanity, rapped hard at my pride, but, as a wounded lioness looks up to make a prey of her

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slayer, roaring defiance, so I did not intend to surrender.

Impracticable, thoughtless, foolishly romantic, I stood before my glass as I ranted to my own reflection: "No one shall take me from my self-imposed heights, rather will I live on the cold, white, impenetrable mountain tops of my virginity. Never will I give myself to a man whose brutality and tyranny I should be subjected to as long as we both should live. The wealth on the list — my latest acquisition, would have given some women all that could satisfy their wildest longings, but I still was large in the conceit that anyone to whom my fancy could attach would be irresistibly attracted to me, and, of course, marry me should I so desire, but as yet I had found men's first infatuation for me to be measured only by the brevity of their passion after it had been expressed."

My lovers multiplied until the very threshold at the front door showed the wear of the many feet crossing it. They were both young and old, and, as I had now been engaged several times, they treated me more as a "bon comrade" than as the ordinary society girl with her innocent, child-like make-up, so charming to the average man.

The young men were at times so aggressively and egotistically violent, without any return of refreshment mentally or spiritually, as to be physically ex-

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hausting. The thought of marrying one of these would be a horror to contemplate.

Then, there were the old men, whose nice exactions as to my conduct were even harder to conform to than the odious clutches of their juniors. But the idea of marrying an old man seemed the most reasonable, after all. Sailing on a sea of cologne, with the best of everything in the world at command, the uncanny snags of an old man's whims and caprices would be smoothed over by so much wealth. These men appealed to me in their weakness while they looked at me as a thirsty dog will at water, their eyes saying, "Give us, give us out of your abundance." It is human nature to discard what we have with a view of obtaining the impossible.

One old man used to come regularly, and apparently failing to achieve the real purpose of his visit, would begin his usual diatribe of all the virtues.

"The effect of civilization seems to have failed in its mission of saving souls, as it has missed you," I said to him one night, "but I do not want to overlook you, indeed that is one reason you are retained upon my list of visitors, because you are so palpably astray in everything that you do or say."

At this his black eyes snapped with the evil of which his Satanic soul was full and he replied: "What good is saving souls? Why should we talk any more of being saved than of being happy; why should any

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one else be a judge of whether my soul is saved except myself, to whom it belongs? We might as well all live in the same place, be the same color, wear the identical same fashion or speak one language as to follow our neighbor's ideas about our little souls? Morality is simply a geographical measure of superiority. Every climate has its physical needs; most religions have their ground plan based on the human needs of the people intended to be benefited.

"Flowers have their perfume and color, birds their song; all nature expresses the sensual life. Present and future happiness, continuance of life itself, depends upon its expression, yet Christianity teaches suppression. It is only when we truly express ourselves that we are any more than stone images.

"I suppose animation is not all that the whole world looks for; there are dark, vile corners to be lighted, horrid crimes to expatiate, reforms of every social kind to tackle, charities to found for the sick and suffering, or the helpless youth and old age, vile practices and dreadful customs, the effect of our effete, our refined civilization, to be eradicated. Our luxury breeds evils that can result only in untold horrors, yet we let it go on. We build our palaces over the sink-holes of vice, whose effluvia is drowned in the pharmaceutical essences of a gaudy self-consciousness.

"We do not say this to each other, simply because we dare not—as if our insincerity were anything



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more than the lace veil that conceals the features of the hag who masquerades as the bride of truth."

Mr. Mead, as he squared his fingers to each other, in an interested way he had when absorbed in his own thoughts, continued: "With all your worldliness there is an innocent candor about you that men love to pay homage to. You don't care where you strike but swing your cudgel 'ad lib,' hitting us all without remorse; perhaps that is why some men are such sillies about you. You have one Circean gift that makes us all blind and deaf with conceit, which is, that you make men believe themselves better than they are. No flattery is so powerfully insidious as that which ascribes a virtue to us which we do not possess. That is mounting Pelia on Ossa, and we sit on the very throne with Jove."

"Well, don't sit in an easy chair telling me of all these perfections, for you are taking the worst possible advantage of me that a man who flatters a woman by word, look or deed can take. Besides, you have been a sort of 'buffet knight,' a leader of cotillions and purveyor to woman's vanity, and belong to a class who speak with pride of their society and the part they play in it, or of whom they accept as friends or reject as unworthy their acquaintance, not knowing that their method of giving or withholding recognition is amusing to those who watch their puppet antics.

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"Go back to the class you lived in, where the aim of existence is to eat bigger dinners than you have appetite for, where you call in the men of brains to do for you what you are unable to do for yourselves, but do not ignore the high price that nature demands for all overdraughts on her power to pay. Go back to your idle, unhappy life, but remember that there are many women in the world who value virtue, without putting a price upon it."

"'Wrought in rarest rose, Dubarry,
Quick at verbal point and parry,
Clever, doubtless, but to marry —
No, marquise.'"

He quoted as he went on in his old-time cynical vein: "My dear, the world is as anxious to give us what we do not want as to withhold what we cherish or would give our very all for. When we are young we hide our feelings, when we are old and have none to hide we make a pretense of showing them.

"It is because you are very young that I hope some day to see you mine. You will economize in sensation now to the end that it will be supremely more satisfactory when impudicity no longer holds you captive. Good-night, little one.

"Yes, mine you shall be," he half whispered as he stretched out his arms to empty space in leaving me.



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Perhaps it was this candor as much as any other note that entered into our friendship which made our acquaintance so durable — so dependable — that was as staunch as the bulwarks of brotherly love, and later led him to call me his brother David, ready to kill his ringleader giant,— society, whose head, he said, my sling was certainly aimed against.

CHAPTER XVI

*"In this world who can do a thing will not —
And who would do it cannot, I perceive,
Yet the will's somewhat — somewhat, too, the
power."* — Browning.

HAVING failed in all my ventures; without hope of happiness at home, and knowing the impossibility of finding it in ambitious schemes of social attainment or the quieter solace of charity, my eyes turned to Europe. Surely amid some of those strange, fantastic peoples, those galleries with their rich treasures of art I had always longed to see, there would be perfect satisfaction. Thus my supreme egotism deemed it possible to bring widest fame to me. But, what was I doing about it? Nothing! Here I sat in my tiny corner of ashes, brooding over "what might have been," instead of going to the great beyond, and stretching my fair, untried wings to the golden, glittering sun of Continental fame, for I never doubted anything possible of attainment that I should really wish to accomplish.

But I finally completed plans for a tour abroad. The sadness of parting from everybody and every-

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thing most dear to me in the world was not mitigated by any of the steamer letters that I received, especially one from a young man who at that time deemed himself my sponsor, lover and general utility man. This letter was as follows:

Dearest:

You have willfully separated yourself from a father who is your best friend and adviser, who loves you more than his own life; a mother who will sadly pine for you, and a country that needs you, let alone speaking of one who cannot bear to think of separation.

If you succeed, I will be proud of you; if you fail I will love you none the less, but before I trust you to the mercies of a strange land I would place you in the hands of our Heavenly Father to keep you from harm and pain as my dearest treasure, dearer to me than I can tell.

You do not know, as I do, how unbearable poor food in uncongenial surroundings and disagreeable associates can make life for one like you, a sensitive, well-bred girl, with a gentle heart, and, while you will be where you always wanted to be, and have great hopes to fulfill, you will necessarily suffer many shocks in this world which coarser natures would not feel. It is sad to think that you will be there in far off beastly Europe, wasting your sweetness on the desert air, or rather, the benighted foreigner.

God keep you safe and happy, to return to us once more.

Sincerely yours,

JOHN.

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The illimitable joy which comes from the hope of a lifetime at last realized, dispelled much of the gloom of homesickness. Seeing Europe became a new religion to me. I could revel in pictures; I could enjoy endlessly a beauty that keeps one in an ecstasy of rare bliss only possible there.

After six months of bewildering sightseeing in Great Britain and on the Continent, I went to Paris to study singing.

The American girl is as amusing a specimen to nearly all foreigners as a new species is at the Zoo, a compliment she returns to the average Frenchman. Dressed by Worth, and educated to the level of their wise pedants, she speaks their language, and will do on the social trapeze what would break a French girl's neck, while she dares entertain her men friends with witticisms entirely out of place, but amusing. Her father is counted as a millionaire with more money than brains or breeding, and treated accordingly. Many Frenchmen in debt even marry American heiresses whom they do not introduce to their families. There is one exclusive set in the Faubourg who do not batten on us, in order to have their palms gilded with our gold, but that small coterie is an exception.

None of us knows who set the fashion of patronizing a broken-down title with a bankrupt, moth-eaten castle back of it as preferable to a clean American

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citizen, with no favors to ask of anyone, for no one has deemed it worthy of immortalizing.

In some preëxistence I believe Paris was my home; for everything seemed familiar to me there. I could not get tired in an eon of time while seeing all that Paris buys or sells.

The beribboned bonne with her charge, the jolly bohemian, the regular building line of the houses, clean streets, dapper men and queer rigged students, the frou-frou grisettes, are all minor details of a wonderful ensemble that makes Paris superior—more glitteringly alluring to the pleasure seeker than any other city on the globe. A natural predilection for Paris must be a moral perversion, for it is a diversion from the narrow path in which the provincialist is content. But, while Paris has a patent on vice, she also has a royalty on things artistic.

With the enormous stacks of newspapers that my friends sent me a blaze was made to warm my frozen hands that I might write the long letters descriptive of this new paradise, that I might relieve my overjoyed soul.

The people in Paris, and everything pertaining to them, have a theatrical air that makes living there seem more like taking part in a play than humdrum, real life. Every time one visits the city this enjoyment comes with an increased ratio. Men are always children in any nation, but in France the coloring of

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ideas is lighter, the manner more sportive. There is an old-time maturity about American women that is characteristic, which in the Parisienne amounts to being the fifth wheel to masculine levity. What impels action in the vital things of life is pretty nearly the same in all countries; heart and soul have the same hall-marks throughout the world. Passion, the prevailing feature of man's nature, makes the main business of his life appeasing the demon.

American women consider it the holy office of their lives to enter wifedom and motherhood, while the main attribute of a French woman's ambition is to be well dowered, so that she may make as propitious a match financially as possible, or, failing that, be considered attractive in society. Eve set the fashion, when evicted from Paradise, poetizing, to try to account to the world for her reason for eating the fruit, which really was, that she enjoyed it.

How God must have laughed at some of her excuses when he finished the earth with that touch of the live coal on man's lips which he knew would fire his heart even though he would not decorate the sphere with many things in consequence. Half the world's successes, that we attribute to a thousand other causes, are really made out of unsuccessful love affairs.

Did you ever notice that after a sin is committed the sinner expects a reversal of things accomplished



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because he is afraid to meet the consequences? Nearly all misery and happiness, all crime and morality, evolve about the sex problem.

The Parisians make this subject the paramount one, to the belittlement of all others. Art, music, science, social economics, are all chessmen before the high priest of Parisian society, sex.

A determination to see something of society in Paris was realized through the introduction to an American woman, friend of Miss Basseau, of sainted memory.

This new friend arranged for my visit to Madame Bouders, a beautiful woman, famous for her salons.

On arriving at her magnificent home, a butler in turquoise blue velvet and silver lace ushered me upstairs, along vistas of rooms, past an onyx bathroom, where a maid had just prepared a perfumed plunge for my lady, into a room with an atmosphere of love and violets about it that appeared to me a heaven of delight, and it took all my self-control to keep from expressing in a gasp, or not appearing "gauche" amid luxuries that were so alluringly arrayed that the moral bacilli of the ulcer of envy, cropped in my fresh, young heart.

Acquainted with no society at home where ladies received gentlemen in their bedrooms while they calmly reposed under the sheets, I was being initiated into the ceremony now.

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A bed of unusual size and shape, gilded and decorated by Doran, sustained the same relation in the apartment that a royal chair generally does in a throne room. A sable coverlet, veiled by masses of point-lace and cob-web linen, was an appropriate covering for so remarkable a woman as I saw sitting amid these trappings, with a beauty like unto a strange, oriental flower. A kimono that would have made a "religieuse" oblivious of her vows did not conceal the perfect neck and shoulders of dazzling whiteness, modelled after the Greek period of Pericles. But her vantage ground lay in the heavenly-blue eyes, heavily lashed with a black fringe, to match the raven hair. It was a face for which a man would lightly throw away his soul and join the men who knocked at her door, whom she changed to swine. The face was magnetically voluptuous. One could not imagine any feeling of pity, or joy or true love illuminating that face.

A Chinese nobleman, arrayed in his native costume, riot with orange, blue and white, stiff with embroidery, his hands laden with rings, seemed tame in importance beside the creature in bed, whose beauty held me as if fascinated.

The Mongolian, a hero to all save her into whose eyes he looked to find a promise to quench desire as he gazed spellbound, to judge from his attitude, was no less rapt than I; for there was something com-

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elling beyond mere beauty, something that was not goodness.

The skin of old ivory color was enlivened by scarlet painted lips full and luscious, that would tempt a bee by their fragrance, that did not smile but curved languidly over even, white teeth.

The Italian maid softly announced, "Signora, una Signorina." The Mongol was annoyed, but made an Oriental exit, fan in hand.

Madame lighted a cigarette. Upon meeting a stranger who is a compatriot, she neither changed her tone nor manner by way of making a favorable impression, as is the habit of the American woman, who knows nothing of repose, minces her words, and affects higher head tones, while she is speaking so many words of absolute insipidness.

She gave me time to be aware of the elegance of her surroundings and countless rare works of art, any one of which would have made a king's ransom. One thing that especially riveted my attention was an ivory screen, six feet high, three leaved, covered by carvings that must have represented the sacrificed lives of a dozen men to the cause, in a mystic country where only art counts. Hidden from sight were vistas of other treasures, gathered from every part of the globe.

This beauty, the quiet, perfumed air, the soothing tones of this woman that all breathed of love and

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fragrant life, made me for an instant pray that I might be detained there forever.

She seemed a part of her beautiful surroundings. Further, I knew absolutely nothing of her history, except snatches of fable to the effect that in childhood she had married an old, roué nobleman, whom France had exiled, never to hear of again until he died in a desert, leaving no will, and without other relatives than his child wife, who inherited his millions.

She expressed a kindly interest in me and, to my untold delight, invited me to take part in some charades that the most noted artists in Paris were to arrange for her. With unparalleled generosity, it seemed to me, she assured me there need be no provision on my part for dresses, for she never wore any dress twice, and that I might choose from among her gowns and her maid would fit them to me.

What a blessed thing is youth with its hope and dreams! What would some of us give to live over the anticipations, let alone the actual enjoyment of our youth?

The time was very long in coming. I was more than prepared when the coiffeur came early in the afternoon, to build up the hirsute construction that was to help to make me famous in Paris that night.

After the tableaux vivants were acted, I outdid myself in the ballroom, acting up to the character that everyone seemed to expect me to be.

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Dressed in the white pearl embroidered brocade that was to have been my wedding dress, my long determined idea of making a hit had an initial success. Everybody was asking who I was.

The men with their jewelled decorations, brilliant uniforms, peculiar dress; the women in their unblushing décolleté, the amazing gems with which they were covered, the freedom of manner—or was it art?—that so cleverly copied nature. Anything to be extraordinary it seemed to me on this memorable night when everything and everybody was like a play to me.

My wit and audacity attracted the attention of a tall, broad-shouldered man into whose face I must have looked with a baby stare of fixed interest, with the usual wish in my mind, whenever I met a new man.

The wish came true, but with dire results that were eventually to destroy me. A lively curiosity to study my style led him to the dangerous quicksand that finally engulfed us both. As a child whose innocence is more daring than the battle cry of a warrior, I metaphorically put my hand in his and followed where he led.

His Russian decorations were more brilliant and more numerous than those of any other man at the ball that evening. His broad forehead, thick wavy hair, dark complexion, physical strength and bright

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conversation, together with a manner which, while apparently and to all outward appearances was coldly dignified, yet expressed a tender, deep concern in my welfare, made him for all purposes of love-making a beau-ideal. My heart asked, could this be the man to make me eternally happy? If we could only cross the Alpine difficulties that I feared would prevent our ever meeting each other again!

We sat long in the conservatory together, under the branches of a hovering camellia. Not understanding his intentions as well as he did himself, I accepted a blossom from his hand, which he first touched to his lips and then gently pressed to my heaving bosom as his great, starry eyes, heavy with desire, looked longingly into mine. Their devouring gaze was too much, and as my eyelids fell he touched my hand lightly, as a butterfly will skim over the petal of a rose.

Trembling with a new joy, far more than with fear, I took his arm, saying that we must return to the ballroom.

"I would like to take you in my arms and carry you to the remotest part of the world," he murmured, while he bent low before me, as a sovereign before his queen.

Coming from him it was to me different than if any other man had said it. I felt that our acquaintance was old, as if we had always known each other. The spark that unites two souls into one, it seemed

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to me, had lighted us to what I hoped would be our eternal heaven.

My entrée had successfully startled Parisian society, but of this I was ignorant, so, with an unperturbed mind, I settled down in harness to the routine work of studying French and music.

"I only saw the present as men taste
Some stimulating wine, and lose all care.
I tasted love's elixir, and I seemed
Dwelling in some strange land, like one who 'dreamed."

Every day my first and last thought was of my "Russian lover," as I secretly called him. Why did he not call, or write me, or send me flowers? Did his vanity that night only wish to show off his English, which he spoke with an unusual perfection?

Humanity is so helpless at times when it wants to be most powerful. Men's society was barred to us in the school, but in the meantime I became acquainted with the various types of girls who fill studios, from the highly successful prima donna to those living on a charity stipend in a garret, with hope fresh and full of ambition — who finally allow themselves to drift with that mighty host that yearly stream to Paris, to flow into the great ocean of oblivion.

CHAPTER XVII

*"And lack of love from love made manifest
A lamp's death when replete with oil, it chokes."
— Browning.*

AFTER traveling through miles of art, after drinking in the deep learning and studying the history with which Europe is rich, one reaches Florence, on the Italian Mount of Olives, when one can safely say: "Here we may be served with a refuge and solace from the sordid business cares that warp the lives of so many of us at home." "Carina," as the Italians themselves say, "lily shod," its Campanile a white finger always pointing upward from a place that will ever be counted as representing the best that the world can get or give.

The Carrara lily stands out in brilliant contrast to all others for perfection and there is only one Firenze; but when we left the superb Dante and the martyr Savonarola for a pilgrim's journey to the Eternal City, we wished that we might have prepared our hearts, for the bronze portals of Rome opened before us a limitless land of pearl whose rich treasures

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begemmed a whole after-life. At its sacred feet I devoutly knelt. Protestant then, I vowed myself — if need be — Catholic, henceforth.

From out this dim candlelight, this crumbling ruin with a history always of the past, one instinctively felt out of place in modern millinery, and the knowledge and appliances that electricity had brought. One's insignificance does not appall one in Rome, it simply brings humility, an attribute that does not essentially affect the natives, for they clatter along the streets indifferent to what the tourist longingly studies as a cult. Little children learn historic lessons by rote, from guides, or the Italian talent for improvisation that answers often just as well as what Grote or Kamphausen may have staggered under for years to give in full detail.

While Florence regaled us with color and poetry, Rome chiseled in marble her greatness. This latter lived for empire, present glory and vaunting pride, while Florence lived for purer ideals and higher thoughts. The one built to the skies; the other is but a shattered landmark of its past greatness.

From Rome to Paris — from the Divine to the eternal human. That all passions are subject to change is a wise provision. It is natural to be affected by present surroundings.

Paris seldom fails to bewitch her most ardent assailants. The women of Paris who would be de-

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defined as "detrachée" anywhere else are considered fascinating there. Parisiennes have the fatal charm of those Sirens of the Podium and the secret circle especially educated to serve Aphrodite. They are rarely club women, and but few serve on boards of charity.

Honor, with American women, means complete immunity from all weakness which could invite or permit injurious comment; but happiness, outside the relation of the sexes with its vast body of energy, desires and passions, is as yet an untouched Grand Llama to the average French woman. It takes time to train an American woman to the French code of gallantry that will smile in her face as it steals all that she has.

An American colony in all Continental cities is a sort of social junk shop. A first experience is the last to those who wish to retain a vestige of reputation or self-respect, for the "declassé" people are the most chary of what others say of them or whom they meet. So, when taking up my residence in Paris I decided to climb the heights to fame through the medium of the "natives," and while attending to my studies I saw much of a society that all the world does homage to by aping its manners.

Feverishly restless to attain prominence in this Field of Cloth of Gold I looked upon my new Russian admirer, Baron Michaelovitch Romanoff, as the only ladder by which this coveted thing could be reached.

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I did not consider myself as alone, for I felt sure that my talent would some day count me one among the brilliant assemblages gathered together in the great salons to which Romanoff introduced me "as one of them."

No entertainment which he gave was complete without me, he said. His courtly manner toward me charmed me; his seemingly unconscious flattery was intoxicating. Accustomed only to the aggressive, business-like methods that American men employ toward a fiancée, I was not aware that the Continental man only bestows upon his wife, or mistress, the attention that an American man will grant for a pastime to any pretty girl that momentarily takes his fancy. The American girl could never be the "jeune fille" of Parisian society, for we run with the lax rein given only to the grisette over there.

I decided to lead this "grand seigneur" into the traces. In the bewitching novelty of this great personage's attentions I gloried and drank deep; everything about him bespoke the noblesse oblige. He should become my emissary to do for me all that a lonely student girl in a foreign country could not do for herself in the way of introductions or lobbying among his friends to place me on the high pedestal that I had determined was the only thing in the world worth having.

This association put bubbles in my blood, so that

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all our conversation and relation with each other was as a long draught of champagne. My idea was that he had become intoxicated with my brilliancy, good humor and beauty.

One evening, as we were on our way to the opera, he asked permission to smoke, but before it was granted he lighted a cigarette. While the match burned, he regarded my appearance with quick survey and a new expression passed over his face as he said: "Your figure, my dear, is absolutely perfect. If you had an aristocratic nose, I would ask nothing more for you."

Something in the timbre of this struck me harshly, but meaning to lightly banter him I said: "You do not care for the heart of a woman then, only her nose?"

"Oh, women can never seriously lay claim to a heart—their days are spent principally in preparing themselves to be pleasing to the men by night, as Balzac so wisely comments."

"That may be the French idea, but it is not all that can be said of the true woman, and the American woman above all."

"No matter who the woman is, or in what manner she expresses the idea, from the lowest subject to the queen, it amounts to the same thing; the main object of woman's life is man."

"No, the main object with us is, to be virtuous

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as well as happy while giving happiness to others. You foreigners all testify to this, because you are marrying us, and I, an American, say it, who should not."

"Bah! only bankrupt titles of England marry American girls, and, if you notice, they are invariably wealthy, and start about repairing the castle and getting the dear husband preferments before the honeymoon, as you call it, has hardly begun to wane."

"The foreigners who have tried us for wives say there are none better."

"Let them say it, I would rather hear than take their advice."

"Would you?" Blushes and a new feeling of resentment against him froze the words on my lips, but I continued, in spite of myself: "You would not object to their companionship — a Platonic friendship may often be more satisfactory than any other relation."

He laughed heartily. "My dear, you do not mean to say that you believe a man and woman can retain such a relationship? It has to be one thing or the other, unless you are married; married people alone can retain the Platonic friendship. My wife and I are perfectly content to live in that way. I do her the honor to place my entire confidence in her, for she is a stone, and we married, as most of us marry, for state and family reasons. She is beautiful and fills

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her position with all the dignity of our respective stations that I could ask."

During this short speech gasps of words impossible to utter must have escaped my lips, for he said, "Why do you sigh so?"

"Oh, nothing — why — how — you did not say, Heavens! — why did you not say that you were married?"

"Say! Why, did you not know? I belong to the oldest family in Russia. Perhaps I could say, with truth, that I am the best known man on the continent, but what difference does my being married make?"

Ah, my head swam, my heart in great throbs beat so hard against my breast it fairly shook the lace and fripperies thrown over it to protect me from the night air.

"You seem moved by some strong emotion, will you tell me why?"

"Because had I known that you were married I never would have gone out with you. You do not understand the American girl who goes alone. I hate being chaperoned, as if I were an invalid or an idiot. There is nothing so immoral as this odjous European custom of branding every young woman as a creature not fit to be alone. It is downright indecency, for it implies that a woman is looking for a moral abyss into which to throw herself. I have gone to parties with a man when the powder would be rubbed on him

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in streaks, with pieces of lace hanging to his coat and hairs on his shoulders, and the taste of his lips on mine, with my nose a fiery red and my temper vile, but in all my career no married man ever had the temerity to face the consequences of his attempt to deceive me into the belief that he was a single man."

"You Americans are beyond comprehension. Why would you look at me with your passion laden soul? Why would you droop before me as a rose before a scorching fire? Why coquette with and charm a man whom you knew nothing of? You even dressed in my colors to please me. You wore this dress to-night because I praised you in it. Is all that virginity? If you do not wish it, then, very well, it must be you who is to decide. I certainly take no joy in forcing a feminine rampart. The sweet gift of a woman's love must be given, offered, even urged upon me, but I never battle for it as some men choose to do."

Was this meant to be a partial relief of the agony of this awful humiliation? In comparison to the boorish force and might of the American man who insults a woman this man's methods were patricianly humane and kind. Compared with the coarse fibre that had heretofore, without reason, subjected me to the rude assaults that were among my purple memories, this would be counted white as snow. Where was all that boasted determination to turn the tide of my fate whithersoever my desire should dictate?

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I asked myself what was my will that it could be willy-nilly with every turn of love's fickle weathervane? No, I was being overshadowed by that very fate in whose face I had dared to laugh. I had crowed that God himself would be fallible while a girl sought love who knew nothing of its meaning.

Destiny, predestination — folly. I should shake my fist at Heaven itself and protect myself against this self-annihilation.

When we arrived at my school Romanoff did not speak to me but let me open the door and get out of the carriage alone. This was a Cossack shot and the most wounding of all. The pity of it is that women must take the coin passed to them, never minding whether it is counterfeit or genuine.

As I sat in my little bedroom thinking of what the terrible future would have in store for me if the ambitions and ideals of a lifetime came clattering about my ears in ruins, the faint dawn of a new day came slowly sifting its light through the curtains, and I looked on that sea of women down below on the pavements of Paris whose short lives of misery never dammed up the stream that had always flowed, would ever flow, carrying them to their doom. Would another fall into their miry midst?

The feeling of guilt, of complicity in a crime would not be wiped out. With pride I had strutted into the mud that would ever leave its stain upon me; nor

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could anything ever obliterate its stench. I must prepare to be frowned upon, insulted and suspected. He had kissed my hand; he had looked into my eyes with a look that had thrilled me till it was an actual pain, as though something sweet, yet sharp, had pierced my bowels. He had tapped my cheek with his perfumed fingertips as he promised to find me all the help needed to secure a hearing in Paris — Ugh!

His broad shoulders had looked so strong and protective as we had dined at Friedrichs, at the Tour d'Argent, where, over the incomparable meal, we had talked out our dreams — or rather mine — of a career.

When on arriving at the school he had thrust into my hand a small package, which had proved to be a regal pendant of diamonds and sapphires, I thought, Russians are so rich and lavish that he does not consider the thing in the same light as a student who hesitates before breaking a twenty franc piece. Could he ever believe anyone so stupid, so innocent, while she gave an impression utterly to the contrary?

Yes, he had classed me with the ill-fed, half-clad, penniless lot, to whom it would be a dire temptation. I, a sincere egotist, with a well regulated conscience, was mistaken in the catalogue for merchandise that one may buy and use or throw away.

As a knell that tolls on dark waters will awaken a sleeping sailor, so this experience awoke in me a new cognizance that the deepest, sincerest passions do not

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Express themselves, and that the flippant froth of the heart, as the foam of the turbulent sea, ends in nothing. Then a picture of those dear ones at home, who had never refused to reach out loving, forgiving arms, made the idea almost bearable that the world should write its worst condemnation upon me.



CHAPTER XVIII

*"Sin, faith, and Islam — these are only words,
And my desire, beloved friend, is you."*

MY alter ego was riding in a golden car hitched to white oxen that with dumb impatience juggled me over ruined castles, which prevented me from deciphering something like hieroglyphics in rose leaves, while a Moscow bell tolled musically, chiming with a cheery voice outside my door, that said :

"Come, come, child, it is noon, what is the matter? It's I. Open the door. Mademoiselle is furious with you. The whole school is sitting down to déjeuner."

The real world opened before me, the bare room, not larger than the modish handbox, the grim, black piano, and the sun streaming in at the window, together with the noises of the street, the quick trot of that magic beast in Paris, the horse of the "fiacre," and the peculiar calls of the hawkers attracting attention of buyers to their wares.

What would my "best friend in Paris," who had never identified herself with its customs, say at finding her student friend so lazy? Bounding out of

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Bed, with profuse apologies I opened the door, saying:
"Enter, O radiant Phoebus."

She replied, in the sarcastic vernacular that her friends excused because of other more lovable traits: "Prima donna is awakening, and how do you feel? Just think, we are going to sail for home, I haven't a moment to spare. Everything is just tumbled higglety-pigglety and off we go, for John had a sudden scoop in America, so the paper sends him as special envoy and high monkey cockelorum of the great and only case of — why, Kate, you in tears? Homesick, too, like a child sick after a Christmas feast? All this success and attention does pall on one, they tell me, but come, cheer up." Then, with sudden, illumined inspiration, she almost shrieked, "Oh, Kate, go with us, you would be fun in the Ark, do go with us. Mr. Suydam said the other day that he would either have to take a sea voyage or a dose of Kate, for you always made him laugh so, which was good for a man like him who gets almost no exercise. Then, Charley can get you to do some of your funny stunts, with a big puff about your being the whole concert, 'on board.'"

No one could have made such an appeal to me in vain, so I prepared to return to America with the Suydams.

At night I would often lean over the gunwale of the boat, as the white, phosphorescent spray bedewed

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my face, and stare out into the limitless expanse of ocean upon which the silver moon showed the pearly light through the dark shadows of the clouds, piled up from fleecy gray to blackest veils of night. The hypnotic, sibilant voice of the darkness beyond, the solemnity of the scene and the quiet, sweet influence of the night in all its soothing quality of mother to a great harassed world that slumbered softly in its bosom stirred me. My heart vowed then, "O stars, O moon, O beauty indescribable, I will be famous, then rich, I will give to the poor, health and happiness shall be mine, but above all, my home shall be as nothing else can ever be." Oh, what a joyous, lovely world to live in, and it was easy to see the brightness and loveliness of home-coming. The softly rocking boat carried many a happy pilgrim, but not one more enthusiastic than one lone girl.

At first, a week seems a long time to be in such small quarters among entire strangers, with nothing to do; for the desultory reading one attempts out of the great supply provided on starting amounts to nothing, but the days, sea-washed from care, pass as a dream, until finally, but none too soon, we see the waving, kaleidoscopic mass of people on the dock waiting for the vessel, that is towed in like a dead whale, slowly, importantly.

On board, quick ejaculations, hurrying to and from some, with pale faces preparing for the custom office

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"Where is he! Oh, I see," but withal everyone speaks in low tones, as if a solemn deed is about to be done that requires a certain dignity of purpose to perform.

Who that has ever experienced it need have told to them the exquisite bliss of hailing the flag in his own country after a long trip abroad! The journey over is generally fraught for everyone with a different quorum of aims from those he has on his return. We go to acquire something, to gain rest or knowledge; fame or social success; but it matters not how many times we cross we ever have the longing to see the familiar things of home life that have left some mark that has added to or taken away from us. The thing that gives us the greatest sorrow is, sometimes, the thing that gives us the greatest solace. The flip-pant partners of our foreign pleasures can never give us what the simple life, among our life-long friends, can at home. We prate of Europe with its advantages over anything that dares to be homemade, and everyone will in time sneak back on some pretext or other. Some of the excuses Americans make to go abroad are so weakly that they are still-born, never to see the light of day.

Towering above the others on the dock, my father gave a twitch to his hat that telegraphed more meaning to me of his gladness to see me than a dictionary of adjectives could have done.

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When we met — what a blessing it was to have his strong arms about me; to see his eyes that knew few tears smiling through them now. We scarcely spoke of mother, because we felt unspeakable things too holy to babble about.

For a long time being at home, with all my friends about me, was happiness enough, but it was impossible not to compare New York and Chicago with Paris, especially as everyone anxiously wished for an opinion on the subject, a provincialism from which we Americans never recover. There was a bellwether tendency to copy a few snobs in this disrespect towards everything homemade. Even one's friends are not always exempt from this criticism. To most traveled foreigners this country, with its growing towns and would-be metropolises, is an interesting study. Especially must the traveler see Chicago, or Denver, to know the typical American city. No one unprejudiced by the contempt that familiarity breeds towards a home product could possibly ignore the fact of a truly representative progress.

The architecture is as the individuality of a person — the expression of a separate personality. No two houses are exactly alike. Interiors, mostly designed, as well as furnished by professionals, permitted no sign of its inhabitant, which gave them a cold, shop-like air, even to the small details.

I missed the "chiaroscuro," the bibelots, the graces

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of color or continuity, or any expression that even the simplest apartment in Paris will exhibit.

The fashion of lacquered white wood, the art and lore of the "Beau Siecle," as Arsene Houssaye, or the Goucourts, had not come in. They had not as yet begun the cheap imitation of the French, Louis Quatorze period. The people in their belongings expressed what they were, even women discussed the cost of everything exhaustively. Both men and women loudly vaunted of their possessions. Art was only patronized by the rich, and then mostly because it was "expensive," or of a foreign mark. In all fields of art, science or literature the imported person or thing alone had the hall-mark of sterling worth or found an eligible market.

The Boulevardier was not discovered. Nothing of the ingenious talent of the Parisian that finds a cosmos in a puddle, was seen.

While I took Chicago's part, and promised it a great future, I complained bitterly of its inhabitants, which became the sword that split the hair upon which a few friends were strung. The citizen runs down his city without thinking that as its habitant is, so is the habitat. But the University had brought its quota of *recherché* souls, among whom it now became my ambition to work up a salon.

My salon looked like Greek olives in January. A few of the French drawing-rooms of the city's élite



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were opened to me by women who spoke patois French, which they practiced and had learned from a few initiated French teachers, too tired at night to properly play the mentor to women aspiring after culture.

The witticisms with which I corrugated Europe, that had opened great portals to me over there, closed even the portholes of society at home, so that this flower of ambition was covered up with the sawdust of the daily grind about me, and another form of vanity was crushed.

The shriek of the squeezed eagle drowned the low voice of mild philosophy and art.

In either London or Paris there are men of leisure who are the Tantaluses of two things which they constantly desire, without ever being able to attain, even hypothetically, mainly: to have their trousers reseated, and to overthrow the government. While this was difficult to achieve, they made a very interesting variety to afternoon teas, in the dim light and quiet peace of a drawing-room, where sociability was the main object of getting people together;—a strong contrast to us at home, who invite hundreds of women to our houses, where we wish to ostentatiously show off our appointments, but rarely see a man of the variety who buys boxes at the opera, or who returns social indebtedness with expensive din-

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Flowers or bouquets of orchids. The larger the crowd and the less comfortable everybody is, the more of a success the entertainment is counted.

The voices of the women as they exchange commonplace remarks about the weather, or the last party, above the din of the two or three orchestras clashing and pounding out their dance tunes or "rag-time," are deafening, not to say nerve-racking. The rich apparel these women wear for the profit of exciting the envy of each other, would represent vast fortunes. Sometimes a half dozen of these affairs a day are counted the necessary thing for deciding one's social status.

Conquering empires, or winning laurels, however small or dusty, would be better than to watch the corpse of love over someone else's tea-cup for the rest of one's life. What did it matter if the dowagers frowned upon me or the young girls, per rule, scratched me off their list? Did I not have resources worth worlds of joy to me?

Music is the language of the emotions. I would waken in others the passions that stirred with a painful throb in my own breast.

A newspaper reporter said of me in a county daily after a charity concert, "Her voice is as pure as a lark's, rich as an organ swell, tender as love's first embrace." It was a suburban paper, but it afforded



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me the joy of seeing my name in print, which is something, but this was only the salvage, not the whole, which was what I wanted.

The world seemed full of wearisome corvees. My associates were mostly women who lived in pattern houses, with moral belief in their bounden duty as housekeepers and the rearers of a growing family into the same rigid propriety as they prescribed; whose husbands took no part in any of the important questions of their country's welfare but ground out dollars with daily precision and a satisfied conscience that all responsibilities toward the world and themselves were thus amply performed.

Determination not to become as one of these turned my eyes again toward Europe. After Paris, Chicago was as the tinsel tawdry of a circus seen by daylight.

Paris called me, I felt that I must go.



CHAPTER XIX

*"To prick me to a pattern with her pin,
Fibre from fibre, delicate leaflet from leaf,
And dry out from my drowned anatomy
The last sea-salt left in me."*

NO miry depth of misery could have been described with more verve than that of my father, as he urged upon me all objections to my returning to Paris to enter upon the brilliant career that I still never doubted for a moment would be mine. It was plain to me what one august parent thought of his darling progeny's possibility of obtaining a success that of itself would be counted by him a disgrace.

However, to obey was one of the virtues left to me; clearly it was my duty to remain on this side!

While waiting to decide upon what to expend my activity at home, that branch of life's curriculum which is never missing from a woman's program presented itself to me,—the male, that never lacked for specimen. There were two who professed a friendship that in the after years proved to be sincere, these men were Clifford Bennet, commonly nicknamed

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Speed, in caricature for his slow and deliberate manner, and Larnard Parker, his chum. The world's experience is that a man's friendship for a woman is a rare exotic, and when a woman is the fortunate recipient of it that she is either above or below her sex in the virtues generally considered necessary for her to possess, if this friendship is to ring true. We can form a good idea of a man's character by what he says of women.

Clifford's nature, inherited from a long line of puritanical ancestry was clear as crystal. Even contact with the society in which by his great wealth he was obliged to live, had not contaminated his heart, always willing, in spite of ridicule, to look for the good in the rubbish heap. He was respected by all who knew him for his influence, which he always tried to throw toward the so-called right. Instinctively courageous, as the truly aristocratic at heart always are, he never saw himself in the light of a hero, as many of his friends did. It was an honor to any woman to have him as her intime. Noted for his sincerity it was one of the balms of existence to have such a man's confidence, to say nothing of admiration.

Even his chum realized what an honor such a friendship was to him, and showed me one time, long afterward, this letter that he had received from Clifford, which reveals his depth of

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sterling character more clearly than I could describe
it.

"Dear Lar:

"You ask your old chum to tell you about his broken engagement in the same breath that you couple his name with that of Kate. Proud as I am to be bracketed with her, even in print, I am especially peacockified because you lay such implicit confidence in my truth-telling, knowing as you do, my awful heredity, and how carefully I have tried to overcome the habit, to please my immediate coterie. My ambition to be a second Ananias is futile. The worst of it is, there are so many ways of telling the truth besides the vocal effort. There is a way of looking it, of acting it, or of fairly breathing it. Every pore of my body blats truth with such elaborate nicety that when an assembly see me enter a drawing-room, metaphorically speaking,—everybody shuts his eyes, grits his teeth, and prepares for the worst. My path in society instead of being rose strewn, with only thorns to contend with, is laid out with the dead or dying who have encountered my lance of truth, or those who wish for death rather than to meet it. To be the accomplished liar you have attained unto I would give half my worldly goods.

"I often sail in with the intention of stroking everyone the right way, resolved to strew thistle-

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down lies that will float everybody's egotism, that I may deserve a vestige of good will from at least one of the bunch; from the seeds of productiveness that thus fly in the air will I distribute good intentions all about,— but no — the portières of the first room are no sooner safely passed than, as a war-horse that smells the battle afar off, with the sound of the bugle blowing in his ears, I sniff a lie — *Voilà!* It is decreed that what my nature longs for most it destroys the speediest. If sackcloth and ashes can make a man over, Heaven, then, ought to give me its unrequited love and make me an angel.

“This reminds me that you did not ask about me, but the truth about my broken engagement, while instead, I have regaled you with a dissertation on, ‘yours truly.’ Suffice it to say that the engagement is broken, my idol shattered, but not until the cloven feet had become enough in evidence to mitigate the pangs my lacerated heart would otherwise have sustained, but, ‘let the dead bury the dead,’ and instead let me tell you of the new star that has risen in my horizon, the Kate with whom you couple my name.

“She is young, but in all sincerity I believe that as her history is not now an unknown quantity, neither will it in the future be placed on the back shelves of cheap bookstalls but emblazoned along boulevards, where those who run may read. It is my humble opinion that her chroniclers will not be myself alone

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but as many as *The Daily Bulletin* can afford to support after the first installment retire for treatment of writer's cramp.

"Upon the tourist's track of Europe she left behind a coruscating trail of anecdotes that do not find embalming necessary to keep them immortal. The high spirits, overwhelming good nature; the reckless sayings, and the frightfully audacious things she did, began at breakfast and only ended when she was forced by the deserted rooms of the hotels, or the decks of boats, to know that it was also her bedtime. One man of her party survived to tell the tale.

"At first sight she is like shorthand copy to a layman;—it looks so insignificant but proves to mean so much. The people who chaperoned her abroad knew not what they undertook. Their sense of propriety suffered from the fierce publicity that anyone acquires who is with her for the fraction of a second, for she is constantly saying or doing something to make her antics bandied about from one to another. Probably no one is born dignified, but she is so essentially natural that a Choctaw in swaddling is not like unto her; something of the savage about her is attractive, too. While she is careless of most things she knows her own rights, as well as those of others, if the press of circumstances is such as to make it necessary for her to assert them.

"There is a time coming when a few of us hope

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that she will wake up to find out that the world, and life, are too big and real for a farce, when she will turn nurse, or scrub the floors, or do any old thing if it could conduce to the further happiness of the man whom she would elect to run double with. She has more of the greyhound instinct to flare out that which is not good for her than anyone who has ever crossed my path, which may account for her being the most virtuous woman in my knowledge of women so far. She is innocent of making a show of it, much less of appreciating its price,—the virtue, I mean.

“Intuitively, I said the moment I saw her, there is no sham there, but she is fickle as the dew. No one has as yet preëmpted an inch of her in any way, and I would advise all would-be poachers not to trespass on what I intend in future to make my own. She affects me like champagne with her light humor, her wit would make a statue of Rameses II giggle irrepressibly.

“With massive gallantry I invited her to lunch with me. The cool candor with which she accepted my invitation brought a blush of wonder to my cheek.

“We went to one of those sacred temples of cultured extravagance, where your feet sink a foot into the carpet, while a faint sound of music reaches your ears. The servants look dressed better than you are and show you the way in a manner that makes you wish that you had worn your new necktie and had

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your hat ironed, as you also wish that you did not **stumble** over things so but could appear more of a **habitué** of the place.

“We saw many of our mutual friends, and Kate **was** satisfied, for her demeanor was imperturbable,—**but** she did not conceive of the criticism she elicited. **Men**, who have the most of it and are ashamed of it, **attribute** curiosity wholly to women. Whether my **little** bird was a golden eagle or a gilded penny had **inflicted** more curiosity upon me than any other **ques-
tion** in my lifetime, but my discovery was, as I had **supposed** it would be, that there was nothing false **about** the ring of the metal. It is pure gold, and I **only** pray to deserve and win it, failing of that, I **pray** that the other fellow may be worthy of so fair **a** possession.

“There are times when she is more like moonlight, **or** a refreshing prayer. Will you forgive me for **writing** at length about a girl you have never seen but **whom** you may be invited to dine with at the home **of** Mr. and Mrs. Clifford James Bennet.

“Write soon to yours on the fence,

“CLIFF.”



CHAPTER XX

*"Let us know all; prate not of most, or least,
Principal, or ease."*

THE dinners of Clifford's friend, Mr. Bradford, were recorded as among the classic events in Chicago's social world. It was not imperative for him to put R. S. V. P. on his invitations, for few of those honored with a card for such a function ever replied in the negative. With one of these invitations he sent a special message that under no circumstances would he allow me to refuse him on this particular occasion, besides, he wished, as it was a bad habit of his to wish, and one that he could not shake off, that I would come early and not leave until late; "a knight of the carpet, from Russia, who cannot speak a dozen words in English will be a distinguished guest," were the words that aroused my special interest.

Regal preparations were made that rather awed those of us who had assisted at many a Lyncurgus feast in that dining-room so eminent in its fame for the best cuisine and rich surroundings, not to mention

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the wine. We waited long and impatiently, but the star guest did not come. At last, late beyond all limit of conventionality, we were ushered into the dining-room without him, which left me beside an empty plate. "That will be for 'Ironclad's' future husband when he grows up, as I hear she has lately retired us old fellows to take the youngsters into her regiment," said Clifford, using the old-time pet name for me of my intimates.

"Miss Ironclad, as your chums call you, I wonder if you did not meet in Paris our friend, the Russian, who was to have been with us this evening. But maybe his age, or his rank did not win your approval," said General Merriwether, one of Clifford's friends sitting near us at the table.

"If the good die young, General, you will have to be asked to stand up and explain why you are still alive," I said, trying to smile so as not to show the pique his sarcasm made me feel.

"To keep pace with your metaphors, dear young lady, I have wondered for a long time why you have not been caught in the flowery toils of matrimony, when your charms have so undoubtedly been admired by not a few."

"'Chaqu'un un prend son bien ou il se trouve' is the best doctrine possible for many things but not in the insuperable contingencies of jumping barriers of single blessedness," I replied, evading any recognition

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of his insinuations. "When I see the choice so lightly made, and how easily pleased some men and women are, I begin to believe in the Arabian proverb that 'a fig tree looking on a fig tree becometh fruitful.'" As this elicited no response from anyone I adapted myself to the adamant indifference that seems to be "au rigueur" at dinner parties.

"The old warhorse will get a few in the neck it seems; if you get after him we will all be thankful, for he puts everyone under the limelight of his unmerciful criticism," said Clifford to me, as he looked about the table to see no one remarked him.

No one seemed really interested in the proceedings. The guests appeared iced and cooled for the event, like the wines and fruits. Everyone was dressed out of all recognition, laden with gems as a lay figure is bedecked in a shop to show off the wares, and with assumed manners that, as a whole, made the assembly ghoulish. Their coarse faces and idle chatter, compared with the sumptuous appointments accentuated the fact that the effort made to have a good time was out of all proportion to the result.

As the nobility of Europe generally know each other, I had wondered if this Russian could be acquainted with the one whom I had met in Paris, and should he not be, had looked forward to making a good impression on him, in case he might redeem the flippant idea of my Paris Russian who could not

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reconcile a woman traveling alone with mental equilibrium and moral resolution.

Unfortunately I had revealed the fact about myself to those of my associates who cared anything about me, that if I lived to be ninety my exuberance (the original sin of natural expression) would cling to me, to my much undoing if compelled to live among people devoted to so-called society. The look of contempt, which was a sort of acknowledgment of superiority, revealed to my consciousness that to me would belong the dower of a fine misery; that they would teach me the complete snub inflicted upon dreaded rivalry, forgotten by the fear of the dangerous qualities of their rival, where, usually, the victim is indicted and the decree signed and sealed by such a court without hearing. Their vices were becoming known to me; to their cosmetics and gossip I was inured long since.

"Are you having a good time, or wouldn't you rather be crouched on the sofa, listening to Lar playing Chopin?" whispered Clifford.

"Candidly, no; I am really very sad, I feel as out of place as a china doll would be in this social swim. Listen to the conversation for a moment."

One woman was lauding a certain emporium for boys' clothes, in Paris; another recited a piece of scandal, while a deep, smooth voice dilated on the slump in the stock market, and a high, shrill voice op-

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posite was saying: "It was so chic, all frou-frou and paillettes, the prettiest confection Driscoll has turned out in a season, but it all went into the fire, for she was not pleased with it." Clifford had said the élite were to be here to-night,—were these the samples he had to show?

Beginning to glow with the effects of the wine, Clifford turned round to look me squarely in the face, at the same time laying his hand heavily on the table as though to steady himself for a great speech, and said: "Everyone cannot have the rainbow quality of your nature that reaches from the quiet perception of light stupidity to the profound depths, which includes a versatility that completes the arc and makes you fascinating."

"Oh, Clifford," I cried, "don't double, for when you do I never understand you, and you have all my friendship, so there is no use in your flattering me."

Placing the index finger of his right hand against his shirt front, and with a comical expression on his face, looking like a lawyer who had been fined for contempt of court, he continued, "Those who persevere and study you are never unmindful of the lasting benefit you are to them. Your goodness, good-humor and wit have been a god-send to me and you have raised the sex line many knots higher, so that all women seem better to me for having known you."

"Nonsense, Clifford, you are not drunk enough to

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be witty nor sober enough to be truthful; not one woman here but believes me to be a menace to high moral society."

"Don't laugh at me, Kate. The first-class society woman is not, essentially, a moral woman." At this old Mrs. Merriwether turned her sallow fat face to look with Tertullian gaze into his florid physiognomy.

Clifford, who possessed that great social chameleon talent of changing the expression of his face, instantly turned towards her, with a bow, "I was just saying, Mrs. Merriwether, that in regard to this past Russo-Japanese affair, it is fatal to project the idea to a conqueror that he can be conquered."

"War is a dreadful thing," replied Mrs. Merriwether as she resumed her knife and fork.

"You women make much more deadly war than we men do," piped up a college professor peering over his gold-rimmed glasses, bound to enter into the conversation and show his pedagogic learning. "You show yourselves stronger than the strongest men in throwing down Cupid and Psyche to worship Midas and the Parcae."

The manner of saying this, more than the words, which did not seem to mean anything to anybody present, incited me to remark with rather more vehemence than I cared to show under the circumstances, "You are hard upon us when you say we pit love and the soul against riches and fate, for fate comes to us



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often in the form of environment, or circumstances which entirely control us; then gold, social position, and propriety compose the triangle emblazoned by respectability on the arms of power, to which every human being aspires. A woman, since she cannot carve out her destiny as men do must, to be a conqueror, have this triangle emblazoned upon her shield, let it cost what it may."

I bit my lip with regret as Mrs. Worther turned upon me a great square, Nero-like face, bedaubed with grease paints of various colors. She lowered her voice to say something, but raised it again sufficiently for me to hear her remark, made confidentially to her neighbor:

"She looks like a yellow covered copy of some vicious novel. They say she always wears yellow, perhaps it may be a sign that she prefers that style of literature. Ah, me, the young people of to-day," and Mrs. Worther eyed me as she asked something of her neighbor, who in answer arched an eyebrow and said, "She appears socially sometimes, I believe."

Hot flashes of remorse made me wonder why this sort of thing impelled me to go on in spite of myself; the impetus was beyond my control, and I sped on to destruction.

"Heavens," almost wailed Clifford in an undertone, "don't you see that every thumb is turned down? Et tu Brute? Cheer up, say yes, and no, come

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fathoms up out of your cynicism that you do not really feel. You will never be called on by one of these women."

Then he donned a regulation smirk that I had never seen him wear before as he turned with a gallant regard toward a lady in a resplendent gown in shocking décolleté.

It was a great relief when the signal to adjourn to the drawing-room was given and Clifford could take me to a corner to lecture, or amuse me, as he felt inclined, and we were beyond complying with the demands of civility that these women made upon us.

"Now, my dear, take my advice. You, as an unmarried woman are a sort of Saint Sebastian, with all the other women aiming their pointed barbs at you. You need the protection of a husband; take me, then you can do exactly as you like. Let me do your fighting. You can drive any man to a hitching post, and he would stay there a lifetime if you but said so. There is something masculine in your nature that loves to crush obstacles in the way. You have indomitable pride and ambition but they won't count when it comes to making you happy.

"They say at the club that when Charlie Winthorp took a lot of you girls out yachting he drank himself unfit while responding to the bumpers and loving cups of the girls; that the captain was sick, and when a great squall clutched your boat that you told the

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screaming and praying girls not to worry, that a sudden squall like that was nothing and would soon blow over, and then you took the wheel and gave orders, and landed them all in port without any more concern than if you had posted a letter for someone.

"They have not any of them applied the alkali test to you, as I have done, to find out how pure you are. Have courage in this, marry me."

Our hands sought each other; the touch assured me of Clifford's sincerity even though employing an almost bantering tone.

"Oh, Clifford, that will do, you talk as if honesty was not often to be met with outside of jail. All women are pure, aren't they? And as for courage, everyone has at least one virtue, but I like you too well to marry you, so there."

Clifford, with his hands in his pockets and his head on the back of the sofa looked at the chandelier as he replied slowly: "No, you are different all around from the whole world."

"I am, Clifford. I am not a disciple of Lecomte any more, but there is a certain fatality bound round me in spite of all volition, all premonition; even though I feel a cold, shuddering fear of something that is to happen, as I have to-night. Maybe it is that I shall some day look like Mrs. Worther."

"What could happen except what ought to happen to a sweet young girl? Every good thing in the world

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ought to be yours, dear Old Ironclad, and while I may, so to say, like to see you the *épergne* of a dinner party, I do not, metaphorically, wish to see you 'in the soup.' You should be a great social success but I am darned afraid that you never can be in Chicago. But, I see our official hostess coming towards us; she will want a song, or some of your stories or stunts. Would you go now if I asked you to drive with me?"

"Yes, Clifford," I said, as our hands clasped in a friendly grip.

We were in the hall waiting for our carriage to be called when a muffled figure stepped in, threw back the sable coat that partly concealed his face, as his large, magnetic eyes strained into mine, at first with surprise, finally with recognition. He glided towards me before I realized who he was or my quivering limbs would move. Those fearful eyes looking out of their shrewd, glittering depths into mine could belong to but one man,—my Russian.

My heart, vain rag that it was, fluttered furiously. To think of this throbbing heart and excited brain pulsating for him. Would it be impossible to down this wickedness? Faugh! While I, the vile thing that I was, could wish to see him, to touch his hand.

"My dear young friend, this is fortunate for me. I was delayed but now am I doubly chagrined. I must see you, I wish to speak to you, there is much I must say to you; believe me still your slave. To-

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morrow at three expect me," he said as if we had parted yesterday the best of friends. He kissed my hand with the same exquisite gallantry that had been part of his power over me. My beating heart and burning cheeks were signs repugnant enough to shame me before this man who had spit upon me and who was now depriving me of volition as well as proper mental equilibrium, for I accepted his invitation, instead of proudly spurning him, as I had so longed and hoped that I might some day.

Hurriedly saying good-night, I was aware of awkwardly stumbling upstairs in a way that a few departing guests who were witness to the scene attributed to mild intoxication.

"What is the matter, dear?" asked Clifford in his softest tone as later we drove along the quiet street without speaking.

"Nothing, only I do not care to talk in this solemn quiet." So we drove home through the sleeping city that the moon hallowed in its calm light, our silence eloquent of many things.

The world seemed quenched of all its wickedness in the soothing night, the everlasting tomb of day. Resolves are best made in the still darkness. If only I could say,— Good World, sinning and suffering, behold, there is a deliverer, and I would take the poor, torn thing called humanity in my arms to wash it of its vanity,— only I could not tear off the little corner

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Of my own heart that was not empty of pride. Humility bought of bitter experience is the most abject in the category, the most painful of acknowledgment. It was this that seared my vainglorious pride to-night. Something told me that the worst had not come yet, and as Clifford bade me good-night it seemed natural that he should assert himself as my everlasting friend in whatever need, and that he would always answer my appeal. If only he could help me to forget this Russian!

CHAPTER XXI

*"Alas, one Summer's fire,
One Autumn's chill, one Winter's discontent,
And now, one Spring of joy and hope deferred,
That I behold May's veil of beauty rent —
And stand unmoved by sun, and flower, and bird."*

A BLUE day, accompanied by a splitting headache, after a particularly rosy evening generally encourages a belated philosophy to indulge in deriding such folly as dinner parties, and condemns as monstrous the social competition, the houses we live in, the clothes we wear, the music we hear, a day when in fact, we betray signs of agreeing with Tolstoy in disbelieving in anything material as good, for everything looks like such palpable nonsense. Was this the effect of the champagne of the night before? Why had this persistent thought of the Russian robbed me of my peace of mind? Why could nothing dispel this depression; was it indigestion, or was it really spiritual acumen that foresaw an invisible chain linking our lives together, and that with no moral result to myself?

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Above all strange things in this incoherent life of mine, how had our lines again converged? How had Clifford and Mr. Bradford become acquainted with this Russian and what had brought him to America? It was impossible to dispel these thoughts which were maddeningly persistent. The conclusion that my mind dwelt upon most was, that no other man would ever, or could ever be the complement or take the all of me as this man did, apparently without effort on his part. Had he not treated me with worse than contempt by offering me money and jewels? Had he not put me on tenter-hooks from the first moment that we had met? Had he not aroused every passion in my nature, till now, at this moment, I hated him with a moral hatred that fairly loved hating — a married man posing as a bachelor, why should he deserve the honor of even my hostility? He could never belong to me. No woman could ever possibly be happy with a man who had grossly insulted her before marriage, without cause. Besides, his Slav notions of classing women with brutes, or other necessary household economics, was not a pleasant prospect in contrast to the queenhood for which an American woman is honored.

Could it be possible that in a few short hours I had fallen from a high, white pedestal to such low, dark depths as to sit brooding over how far a young woman's fortune might be cast with a married man,

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when she professed such a stoic indifference towards all the free men who plead with her to share their "world-goods"?

What a farce it was,—the wife of this Russian probably wondered what the women could see in him to admire.

Like a bright spot that hypnotizes one, so the thought of Michaelovitch Romanoff led me into a drowsy reverie as I sat before the snapping wood fire that vied in its brightness with the skurrying snow-flakes softly falling outside in fluffy piles on the hard lines of the city's ugliness. The air became gradually tinkling with sleigh-bells; then a particularly musical set of chimes caught my ear and as they suddenly ceased ringing, I peeked behind the blinds and saw that a Russian sleigh had stopped before the house and a man muffled in sables was alighting. He came up the steps; there was no mistaking his manner. He was ushered into the room before I had gained my poise, which the astonishment at the boldness on his part had shattered. I could not escape, because his strange charm held me in a fascination, which he could not help but recognize.

"You surprise us with your sudden appearances," I stammered.

"Yes," he said, "ostensibly business that Russia is negotiating with America brought me over, but primarily the desire to see you is the real reason of

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this visit, over which you do not seem to be rejoiced, — you have not even offered me a welcome.”

He reached out his jewelled, white hands that took both mine in their soft clasp as he kissed them gently.

“How have I dreamed of you, thought of you day and night, wished to, oh, longed so much to see you, to touch your fingers as now, to look into the soul beyond the blue veil of your lovely eyes; I have daily offered up two prayers to the Icon for you, my white flower, my diamond in the snow. I would like to frost you in diamonds but they are not worthy of you.”

He dropped on both knees, in the Russian attitude of prayer, and devoutly kissed the toe of my white slipper. A tyrant is always servile.

Turning to the fire, my hands clasped tightly as a help to composure, I said, in a voice so low that he was obliged to come nearer me to hear: “This is exaggerated pretense of a devotion that you must know is not flattering to me,” and I turned quickly to face him. “You must have known that when I dismissed you in Paris. You must have had sense enough to realize the truth about me,—that I did not expect you to make another attempt to insult me, especially to come to my own home to make me feel again all that it has indeed been difficult to forget.”

He stood so close now that his breath, in quick, hot gasps, floated through my hair. But, while afraid to look at him, the old familiar magnetism of his



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presence was the same unchanged thing, that gave me such horror of him.

"There can be no pleasure to me in seeing you again. Why do you desire to come to me?" A sigh escaped me, and I had flung my hands out in a wild gesture inclusively meant for many things.

He threw off his self-contained manner as he excitedly walked away from me, saying—"The reason that you gave in Paris for not seeing me, that is my wife—my wife died more than a year ago. Now I am alone, and lonely. Your pride would melt, you would repulse me no longer if you knew what you could be to me, how much you could do for me; come, let us be friends. You have lovely, soothing ways, it is not kind of you to turn away and be cross only to me. To leave the noise of the horrid world and come here in this quiet, cosy way is Paradise to me. In traveling over every land of the globe I have found no woman who has been able to obliterate your face from my mind. The sound of your voice thrills me as no other can, I long for you, I must be near you, so do not resist me, for nobody can in the end."

This sounded so familiarly like the others it brought me to common earth with much relief. I turned away from gazing into the fire and sat down in a large red chair. Beware of a boast, jest, or touch word. We laughed now with each other.

This was the beginning of a three months' campaign.

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It was a tug of war, my will against his, but his flattery mastered my pride, which was the first rail off the barrier I had intended, as it is off every barrier with which any woman surrounds herself.

From the first the Russian asserted in foreign fashion his wish to marry me. The rounded philosophy born of a lost hope had long since decided me that marriage alone could dignify a career to any woman, whatever her ambition.

The vast wealth of Michaelovitch Romanoff would enable us to live apart much of the time, as we would travel, or perhaps, in some happy event of the future, all in good time, a young man would fall in love with me, and my liege lord, now fast approaching his allotted time for life, would die. The coach would ride easy if it was gilded. Every fibre of my body lusted for luxury, beautiful objects to look at, the high preferments of society, distinction; all the enviable qualities that go to make up existence should be mine with one word, which many a girl, I was sure, of my acquaintance would never hesitate to accept.

An eidolon wafted into view, the image of happiness decked in bridal veil, a Danaë, all in one. The heavy feet and sultry hearts of those wedded ones on my calling list did not appear to warn me.

"Curse not the king, no not in thy thought, and curse not the rich, in thy bedchamber, for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath

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wings shall tell the matter," was a verse of Ecclesiastes that came to my mind. Hypnotic influences are ever about us,— he might read my thoughts, for he was capable of it.

My yellow gown was becoming. It hung to me as the peplum to a winged siren of the Podium, and had its effect one particular evening when, in the rosy light of the drawing-room he almost convinced me that it would not be so colossal a task to learn to more than tolerate him, especially with the passing of years, for in the connubial state few dared to expect much more than a gilded happiness of short duration.

Perhaps the only thing left for me would be to worship this God Mammon, for the inexcusable thing in anybody is to be poor.

I thought of other instances resembling mine. There was Emma Hæthnaite, nearly forty years old, without a redeeming grace in the world, who talked of marrying for money with all the aplomb of a spoiled beauty — as if her empty life could be satisfied with it. "Think of it," she had raved about a man whom she had recently met, "if I marry him I will have the swellest turn-outs. He has only been a widower three months, but he needs a companion all the more because he is lame, and not in the best of health. His house has thirty rooms and I shall be mistress of it all. I shall do it all over and shall

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have the billiard room on the first floor, and put all those portraits of his wife and family upstairs in the top hall."

"Do you care for him at all?" I ventured on the strength of our old acquaintance, to ask.

"You know perfectly that no one is happily married. The very fact that you are bound together by accepting a law is enough to obliterate every idea of happiness. No! women at my age do not romance about so matter of fact a concern as marriage. You know my time will be taken up with all sorts of things, and as he is a club man, in for all sorts of pastimes that I cannot take part in, we shall get on famously. Of course, we shall have separate rooms, so that I shall not be disturbed by his bad temper or importunities when he comes in late from the club."

Emma was a society girl, trained from the root. She was respected in the "best society," voiced the creed that had been dinned into her ears from childhood, so it was no discredit that she counted as life itself a thirty room house with a well filled stable attached. She saw no need for pity that what her heart and soul demanded turned from her at the altar which was devoted to the only God that the world, the flesh and the Devil knew — Mammon. Pshaw! What was the use, the whole mighty world to a man could not be mistaken!

At last I was the affianced wife of Michaelovitch

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Romanoff. I no longer was disturbed by the doubts or trembling fears that had assailed my calm dispossessed soul so many eons ago, when I had crouched at the feet of a lover whose manliness never had cast a shadow upon my better self. The one remaining untried thing in a woman's gamut of experience now appeared to be marriage.

There is no ennui so terrible as pink teas, club meetings, a constant round of dressing and useless nothingness. All this boredom I would escape. I longed for the wider fields that this marriage with a famous diplomat would open to me, a new world with such things only as my desire should manufacture.

Then, to make for oneself a home. Ah, that of itself would compensate for any suffering. The new interest of a household; maybe the sweet ennobling influence of a child would come to possibly change this commonplace-world-fatigue and nauseating idea of social success into a sense of one's realness and oneness with God.

Irrespective of the man, my own varied resources would make me independent of all other needs, if fate should thrust me back upon them.

From the first moment my father met this man he indubitably took a strong dislike to one whom, perhaps, he recognized as a probable contestant for my hand not likely to be easily refused.

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My father's attitude toward me was marked by a passionate, jealous love unusual in a parent, and when one morning he heard the truth about my decision in my faint, faltering words, he made every effort to change my mind, but to his great regret, all his efforts were unavailing. His face, usually florid, went white to the very lips as he asked in harsh, constrained tones, "When is he to see you again?"

To my reply that Michaelovitch was to be with me that morning to arrange a few details for our wedding, my father hoarsely said: "Very well, I will be here." Then he fastened his driving gloves and slammed the hall door.

Dreading the outcome, but not daring to interfere, I waited. My father came home from his business to the minute of the hour appointed for the meeting.

After the usual preliminary of a greeting, my fiancé was not dull in guessing that the storm clouds hovering over his head at this moment were not all silver lined, as my father had said: "You have been talking of marrying my daughter for three months. Baron, though you have not yet asked my consent, but if you ever do, prepare to be refused. Kate cannot possibly be happy with such a man as you, for I know you will ruin her life. It is not your intention so to do, but a man with a low-down, sneaking character, such as yours, could not make any woman happy, let alone the

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silly idealistic sort my daughter is, who knows nothing of the real nature of the world. I want to say to you that I want you to get out of my house and never come into it again, by God."

Seeing the look of anger on my father's face I knew this was the beginning of a dreadful scene that I dared not witness, so, running up to my room, and closing the door, I heard nothing except as one hears distant thunder in a storm-cellar. The fact that my father was loudly uttering his anathemas at the man who had struck home at his future happiness, rather flattered me.

It was of no avail. Opposition is the screw that fixes a resolve definitely, in some minds prone by nature to obstinacy.

Now, more than ever, Michaelovitch urged a hasty marriage, to be as simple as possible, and, dominated from the first by his will, there was no question but to accede.

When I told my father the date we had decided for our wedding, his pallor frightened me. He looked at me with a vacant, helpless stare that was reproach enough to my poor, weak conscience. I was a primer to his accustomed eyes, for while the lover may be blind, the love of a parent is all-seeing.

"Sis, I had planned to go South about the time you intend to be married," he said in a strangely soft voice. "We have shared each other's joys and sorrows for

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many years, but in this we will — have — to —” he played with his glove, unable to say more.

“Papa, you must come to my —” we could not talk of it together. Neither of us could endure the thought of this bitterest of all separations.

The remembrance of that other morning came to both of us when, with a sadness as keen but quite different from this, he had raised his voice in anger, when I protested against marrying, and had said, “You must marry, there is no reason why you should not. After all the publicity of your engagement your purity will be dragged in the mud.” Those words were cameo cut in the hard rock of a heart fossilized in the stormy waters of bitter experience.

My father decided to go South two weeks before my wedding, which was set for Wednesday, the thirteenth of April.

The Sunday before, my fiancé and I drove together in the park, when he asked me if I would sign a contract with him, as it was the custom in his country to do, saying that it would prevent all trouble, or quarreling, in case that he should die before me.

Generous souls are defective in business faculty. My whole training had been not to give away what I had not, not to want what did not belong to me. Never having heard anything about business, or talked of money, our family was peculiarly exempt from any of the cares that most women worry about at an

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early age; the people who strain every nerve to make an appearance, whose lives are spent in the accumulation of money, and whose hearts are full of envy, while their pockets are empty, the values that are known in the markets, were not intelligible to me.

It seemed to me that a woman's standard of values must be entirely on the esthetic and moral side. That upon men alone devolved the duty of discussing business or any of its details. My wants had been neither extravagant nor many, never beyond the needs of the present moment, and my bills had been paid without a murmur. Money was almost an unknown quantity to me. Now that the time came to talk about it I dismissed it entirely from my care to the hands of the man to whom, it seemed to me, my interests ought to be paramount to any other consideration, just as it was my duty to give to him the fragrance of my past, the hope of all my future, and all that I ever was or expected to be.

On returning from this ride with its loveless conversation, Romanoff left me with my promise to do whatever he should ask of me. I would await his coming to that end Monday evening, when he would bring the contract for me to look over. This he admonished me, was not to be mentioned to anyone.

Our approaching marriage was whispered about and talked of in the way that one makes conjectures

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about the weather for to-morrow, or the probable fate of a throne without an heir. The more my father and mother made a doubtful question of it the more my heart tried to dull itself to the sensation of giving this most poignant grief to two people whom no one could convince me would ever be replaced in my affections.

One day my little mother, who always tried to hedge on the right side, that is, on the side that conformed most to the wishes of those she loved, even in their contrariness, said to me as we sat together in the living room: "You do not seem to be like most women, determined to marry only the man you love. Perhaps you have arrived at an age when a woman ought to establish herself, but every time you go out with the Baron," she continued, trying hard not to cry, "you become so hysterical, so bitter — do you not remember how several times you have flung yourself on the bed in a paroxysm of agony? Why do you feel like this? Why should you marry a man whom you do not love? Kate, dear, do you love him, or has his brilliant position, all the things it is possible for him to give you, anything to do with this? If you do love him, my dear child, no one shall ever say I had any idea of opposing your marriage.

"At eighteen you were too young to marry, but tell me frankly, whether I ever really said you should not," and the tears rained down her pathetic face while her

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great Madonna eyes looked into mine full of the purity of love's self-sacrifice.

"A brother of mine ruined my sister's life by refusing consent to her marriage to the one man whom she loved, inducing her to marry another man entirely unlike the man she would want for a husband. The man she loved and herself had been children together — he returned her love in full, their very beings were united, but her body and duty were bound by law to another.

"Oh, dear child — don't, please — please —"

As a river, ice-bound, will suddenly be loosened from its prison by the rays of the sun, so my mother burst into a torrent of tears and a passion so unusual to her that I knew unless I went away it would completely upset my self-control, so going to my room I tried to determine for myself. The effort resulted in a vague listlessness which turned to annoyance as my mother, after an hour or two, opened my bedroom door: "Kate?"

"No, mother, do not commence, I must be calm, it's the only way. It seems like a fate. I do not want to marry him, it is all a mistake, but there is no other way; he is determined. Do not feel so dreadful about it. It must be. I shall escape other annoyances, and women learn to control their husbands. What is there about this marriage that is so alarming? Why—" irresistibly I snatched her small, frail body to me —

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"if only we need never part. We act as if we were to be tried for our lives; but a wedding, Mamma, think of that! Most mothers lie awake nights worrying to find some way to get their daughters married. Then the new life — the new dignity, all the best things in the world ought to belong to a married woman!"

"But, do you think that an American girl could possibly be happy with a foreigner? Think of the difference in our codes and views of life, think of their breeding; you were always good to me, Kate, and I can't bear to see you unhappy."

"There, there," and comforting her like a child I wiped away her tears. The dearest mother's face in the world I told her, that no Raphael could ever reproduce. "No, Mamma, it's not the fashion nowadays to wear your heart out for anything, or let the cankerworm of sorrow destroy one vestige of your freshness or beauty, especially when it is as rare and perfect as yours."

Partly to escape this flattery my mother smiled as she said: "I will go downstairs now to meet the Baron, he will soon be here, do you care if I speak with him?"

"No, dearie," I replied, trying hard to give as cheerful an impression as possible, "only do not make your parley too long-winded a performance, for whatever he has a mind to do that he will do; you, nor anyone, cannot move him — besides, let it alone; what

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is the use? We cannot all be utterly oblivious of our religious duty to be respectably unhappy now and then; don't you know that nothing shows the inequality of the unchristianized so unmistakably as to be happy?"

All this time I had been arranging my hair, and putting on extra touches to my toilet, but when I had finished I cried, in a change of mind: "No, no, get you to a nunnery if you talk of happiness, woman," and with theatrical tone and gesture I stood before her bravely defying her searching glance.

She turned, and the rapid, light step of her little feet died away as she went down to confer with the object of our combat, who had arrived, as we knew by the heavy masculine voice heard in the hallway.

Taking time to recover from my recent emotion I calmly descended the stairs about the moment my mother's conference was at an end, for I hesitated on the threshold as I heard her talking to the Baron, whose back was toward me, but he felt my presence, for he turned round as one who takes no part in a conversation but politely attends to the finish.

"Come in," he said, rising from his seat. He came to me, kissed both my hands, and we sat down together. Little mother looked at both of us. If she had it all to settle as she wanted it how smoothly our toy train of cars would run on its railroad of love; but she sat on her chair as before an inquisi-

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tion, timid as a mouse to wound, yet brave as a lion to defend. She was torn between these two ideas, as if by some magic touch of love that knew no bounds she wanted to set going the right machinery without knowing exactly what to say.

"Baron, do you believe sincerely that you can make her happy? She is our only daughter, you cannot know what it means for us to lose her, or to feel that she would not be happy; for her disposition is glad and sunny, she has never given us one unkind word. We have been an unusually devoted family, our happiness has been one, and it seems impossible to realize that we can ever be separated."

"Do not say that, dear Madame, you and your daughter will see much of each other."

"Oh, yes, perhaps, but a woman's life is quite different when, like a flower, she is transplanted to other environment from that to which she is accustomed; to a strange people and habits; perhaps difficulties beyond her power of solving, and you travel so much that her home life will be changed with, perhaps, a bad effect. May I ask why you are so determined to marry her?"

The naïveté of the question rather amused him, as he smiled quietly and adjusted himself to a more comfortable position. "Can you ask so very apparent a question, Madame? It seems difficult to me to find reasons why I should not marry her."

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Awed by this diplomacy, my mother hesitated, clasping her hands tightly in her lap. In a bout of words with a man whose measure was Machiavelian my little mother would be sadly checkmated.

Nervously I walked to the window. The great outdoors! It was always a relief for me to see it. Nature is such a great comfort to those who seek her.

"Well, then," said little mother as she reluctantly rose and offered her hand, "as you and Kate wish to see each other, if you will excuse me, I will go. We are so miserable with Kate away from us even for a week or two that you may understand, but — au revoir."

"Rest assured she will be in safe keeping."

Little mother quickly left the room.

Of one thing there seemed to be sufficient proof, that was, that in whatever he undertook he would get the best of the bargain. His marriage would be no exception. I had looked to nature, she told me that the plumb line he had thrown would sink deeper, and ever deeper.

He came and put his arm about me.—"Your mother is childishly frank. She told me she did not believe international marriages could ever be happy because she had never heard of such a result — that we are an immoral people, with entirely different codes from Americans; that our women are bound by different social customs, and that when a nation accumulates



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wealth a leisure class of men crop up to aid in the moral ruin; that a golden age always brings to a country its downfall and that honest integrity is associated only with the poorer classes. Ah! It is strange."

CHAPTER XXII

*" Brave as a falcon, and as merciless,
With bright eyes watching still the world they prey,
I saw thee pass in thy lone majesty.*

* * * * *

*Lo, thou art captured, in my hand to-day
I hold thee, and while thou deignest to be
Pleased with my jesses, I would fain beguile
My foolish heart to think thou lovest me, see,
I dare not love thee quite."*

THE house was still as death, not a sound could be heard. A dim light from the lamp on the library table was a wise provision in case of any emotion that was best to be carefully concealed, for there was no exact premonition of anything foreboding, I tried to convince myself. The meeting arranged for to-night was to be merely for commercial purposes, that was enough to quell any romantic ardor, if any happened to be left over from the experiences of the past three months.

The slow, heavy step of my aged lover was heard on the porch. As the hour was very late, I hurried to open the front door for him myself.

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His air was coldly formal, with unkind brevity, or rather, a disregard of any light pleasantry, in his greeting. He entered the room with an air of one about to transact business, and sat down in the large armchair that he usually chose, then slowly took out of his pocket a large paper folded as a legal document, the first I had ever seen.

"Will you kindly read this?"

The paper was typewritten, and headed by three words apt to have a fatal import upon two people at least: Anti-Nuptial Contract. My eyes were riveted to the long thin sheets of paper, to the last word.

It did not take much time to read it, but, oh, the shame of it. I stood before the table, facing him, but I saw nothing around me. My eyes saw far, far into the future, far back into the past, they traveled round the world. They saw the starving, hungering wretches being lashed under the knot as they dragged their weary, leaden feet to do the bidding of the slave drivers who tortured them. The unfreed black weltering in the cruel stripes that had just been inflicted looked into my eyes with a pleading most pitiful. Tortured, caged animals silently preached their distress to me by the appeal of their eyes; dumb suffering cried to me across the barren space between this document and past liberty.

This man's heart showed him to be the slayer of virtue, the despiser of God, and the fear of all who

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knew him. Did he have an object beyond my ken, hidden by a not yet discovered generosity, in drawing up such a paper as this?

In order not to openly scorn him now, to point my finger in disgust to the door and tell him that he might go and never return, I held tightly to the table to steady my swaying body, for two days afterwards we were to be married. What respect, or position could I ever again hold with such a reproach! The past, and this fact held me with a chain of iron to this, this — ah!

As if in pain I clasped my hands behind my head to think of the thousand things that made my heart throb with newly aroused contempt, and lighted a hatred that — bah!

I was very tired, exhausted by the emotions of the last few days, and sank into a chair standing beside the table. We gazed at each other — I leaned on the table and looked across at him and into his face to see what I could see. He had once spoken of the fear he had of being married for his money. Was he disguising some real intention? Would time show that he had — oh, no, he surely was better than this would indicate.

There was no other way than to sign it now, of course. To refuse to put my seal to whatever was given me by this man to whom I had promised to give myself, whom I had promised to marry, would it not

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be as a sale, in fact, if I should, as it were, put up the price? To haggle or barter thus at such a time stunned every vestige of what I then considered the sacredness of marriage. The whole structure I had so carefully built up about myself seemed to come toppling down about me to shriek in my ears what no one ever before would dare to whisper. Suddenly I seemed to become a fiend, a cheat, the man had now become loathsome to me and I longed to break my fetters and be free, away from this smirch that his finger would put upon me with the blackest ink.

While gazing at the lamp, wholly absorbed in these thoughts, his heavy voice came as a distant sound, with every word distinct as a life sentence. Ugh! I shook myself together for the ordeal. The horrid sensation of repugnance was somewhat less poignant. The idea of looking at him was not a pleasant one but my eyes sought his as though a new being had suddenly appeared before me, and I saw another Michael-ovitch.

With great precision and a modulated intonation he said: "Please read the second clause again carefully."

His glittering eyes were taking in every detail of my innermost thought; he read the whole story. A criminal on trial for his life feels all this that I suffered. Yes, it is just that for every thought, good or bad, we must pay the penalty. Judas paid with his

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life for the word lightly uttered, Ah, the thirty pieces of silver! But what had Judas to do with this? I was no traitor — no, true to myself, I would throw out my chance, be subdued and reasonable, marry where my heart should dictate; but all that is out of date, so old-fashioned. No, to adjust unhappy circumstances, to adapt ourselves to the inevitable, seemed to me to be the words of the second clause, but instead, its import read that in case of divorce, or separation, he would not be responsible for alimony or any settlement but a pittance of two or three thousand dollars.

An intuition that makes me wonder now, because it was so clear, read a strange final judgment in the case. In an excess of jealousy you might do something, or someone would influence you against me so that, beside yourself with rage, you would send me into the streets penniless.

"It will stand as it now is, however, for all time; neither the laws of my church nor country believe in the lax divorce laws of your beloved America, and as I expect to live in this country the rest of my days, this paper was made out to fit the law of Chicago, as I have taken up my residence here for the rest of my life."

The mills of the gods do grind finely as well as slowly. So, the main desire I had expected would be fulfilled by this marriage, the one anchor weighed

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in this sea of trouble, that we would live in great state abroad, would not be realized, and instead of it, we would be relegated to the dirty streets and bad climate of a city that I had learned by long residence abroad to abhor.

Unable to look into his calculating face another moment I sank helplessly back into the chair, hiding my face in my arms in a dumb despair, too hurt to cry out, or complain.

The next morning we met in a lawyer's dingy office to sign the contract. Contract! the very word made me feel like a mortgage chattel; "the party of the first part, and the party of the second part," were words that strangely classified us as the bargainer and the bargained for.

Perhaps the sorrow that I felt was owing to my own ignorance. Legal business must necessarily be dry, if not harsh or cold-blooded. The law must be right, if its ponderous importance did look formidable.

We sat down in wooden office chairs, the lawyer bristling with officious care for our comfort when he asked:

"Do you sign these papers of your own accord? Do you realize their import?"

"The Baron wishes me to sign them; beyond that I have no voice in the matter," I replied, with a certain hauteur, as though anyone would question a desire so simple as to sign away every legal right a



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woman had to the man she was, within twenty-four hours to proclaim to the world as her acknowledged master.

An unaccountable repugnance towards this man, so soon to be my husband, possessed me and lowered my respect for him, a respect due to his superior age and experience, and his great power. Many times I had agreed that it would be just as well to marry for "position"; now love was consumed as completely as smoke vanishes into air. Why or how I did not stop to consider.

The papers signed, sealed and placed in a strong box, we left the office and took luncheon together, after which I hurried home to occupy myself with preparations for the coming event, that would decide for one woman which path she would take, toward Heaven or Hell, when she put on the wedding ring.

His last words as we separated were, "If you write to your father tell him I have left your fortune undisturbed, without asking him to give you a penny."

His sarcastic chuckle as he said this sent a poisoned arrow of dislike toward him that I prayed might not grow more poignant as the years rolled over our misery, for this transaction as much as anything gave me a true insight into the meaning of his life, entirely controlled by the greed for money.

It was later that he taught me why a man who loves



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money never loves anything else, and when he offered me the treasures and jewels from his strong box, he estimated them higher than any affection from the heart.



CHAPTER XXIII

"The joy of our hearts is ceased, our dance is turned into mourning. The crown is fallen from our heads."

MY wedding day dawned bright and clear. After I had arranged the flowers and sat "finished" under the deft fingers of the hairdresser a telegram came from my father, saying:

"Love and best wishes. Hope you will be as happy as you anticipate."

The unexpressed love, hidden in a bitter regret, that this telegram meant to me no one could ever know. That the only man who ever had, or would truly love me, should go a thousand miles away rather than give me to another aroused within me feelings that I had to choke down. The awful sight my swollen face would be in case I let myself go prevented a long, hysterical cry.

My revered uncle, who had come from the country to perform the ceremony, sat in the den, while the groom explained to him the phrasing he wished for the ceremony. "Everything referring to worldly goods must be eliminated. Obedience and love were

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superfluous, as it would naturally be supposed that the parties most interested would attend to that," he had said.

The groom came, in an old suit, without even the accessory of fresh tie or new shoes. We greeted each other formally, in the den, before we went down. The few friends to whom I had telephoned were beginning to arrive. One aunt and two cousins had gone into the usual ecstasy about the beauty of the bride, how composed her manner, how gorgeous the wedding gown, and adjusted the popular superstition of "something new and something old, something blue and something gold." Then, spreading out the lace train, they went downstairs to join the few invited guests, while the groom stood on the stairs saying in a loud voice, "Why doesn't she come?" Finally the "Lohengrin Wedding March" sounded.

The stillness was something funereal—"I pronounce you man and wife," had just been said. The words were quietly intoned, but they sounded loud and harsh to me. The solemn ceremony was over. Then the congratulations.

I had stepped out from under the canopy of flowers, out into the room, and away from the side of my husband. My tears flowed, my heart was breaking—the awful loneliness of a convicted man came upon me.

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Someone drew me back to where I should have been, under the flowers beside my husband, then someone said, "Kiss her," and the light touch of his lips brushed my cheek. When I looked into the implacable face of the man I realized that we were not married in the same sense that two young lovers' hearts are joined, and the words of our ante-nuptial contract rose up in my mind's eye to explain many things. Of course, we had entered into a bargain — on a commercial basis; "the same as if sole and unmarried"; no one asks that a heart shall be put into the scales on such an occasion, that would be too flattering. I did not think to question the real exchange of values then; — that came later.

After the ordeal of the wedding breakfast, when we were on our way to the bank and the lawyer's office to finish the signing of more papers, I leaned over and kissed him, more from a sense of propriety than a burning desire to do so, for this recent growing dislike of him gave me a peculiar pang. "Don't make an exhibition of yourself in public," he said crossly, as he pushed me away.

We were silent till we reached the dingy, bare room of the lawyer's office, which seemed to be an uncanny place on that radiant, white day of all, one's wedding day. A premonition began to form in my mind that the dust of legal business and prosaic matter-of-fact dealings would be the trend of my existence with this

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man whose eyes sought mine in a hypnotic, steady gaze not at all easy to counteract.

"Do you sign this contract of your own free will and accord?" asked the lawyer, who sat with his back to me, while my husband never took his eyes off mine, wielding a subtle influence of will over me that mere words could not have done.

"I have not refused my husband's wish in regard to the other papers, why should I hesitate now?"

"Because," replied the lawyer, "this is the irrevocable 'sine qua non,' that can never be changed or altered. This fixes the oath that you have signed so that every right that you have in the world is taken away from you. Here it is," and he handed me a paper to read.

Except that it contained details if anything dryer and more uninteresting than the other paper, it seemed to have practically the same import of leaving his wealth at a very safe distance from my hands. It seemed to reiterate, to never get done with the words that should make him free, and to take away all the power that God or man should give to me to obtain any of his money. There was a cruel, hard ring about the thing that made me cold and hot, that excited a feeling of resentment nothing would ever extinguish; the cruelty lay deeper than the mere law details of the paper. There was an undercurrent mysterious, awful, not for me to then understand.



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It was as though a thief, after he obtained all your worldly goods, had throttled you. As though vulgar, dirty hands had been laid upon my immaculate holiday attire. Mentally, spiritually, I felt tired, bedraggled. There was less self-esteem, but why? I evidently could not be the first and only woman sold and thrown on the brush heap. One hears of young women doing this sort of thing every day, there is no law to prevent her. Of my own "free will and accord"; how could one turn one's guests adrift, make a ghastly spectacle of oneself the day before marriage and be a scandal for a lifetime? And why? Because the price was not high enough. We send missionaries to put an end to this evil in a country where the women are black in body and are supposed to be ignorant, but here no hand is raised to save a society girl from herself, because she knows of no salvation. She wears her chains with a grin that the world flatters her into believing can be mistaken for a smile.

There was a species of heroism in it. They should see how like an empress I could sign away the earth, if it were mine, to this man opposite to me, now my husband. Women who marry American men need on their wedding day, only promise to love, cherish and honor their husbands all their lives, till death should part them, and the husbands make it quite worth their while to so liberally engage to do their



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part. None of the usual promises made at the altar, that are so carelessly broken afterward, were made by either my husband or myself, and the real truth was beginning to dawn upon me that his love was in his strong box in the safety vault. This was the first of many unhappy blows to my self-respect. For the sake of the theatrical effect, I made an effort to show in what liberal contempt I held all things that are not of the heart. Page after page I turned — at last writing in a large, bold hand the signature, which reached so far across the strip of legal paper that it looked very well, I thought.

“There,” said my husband as the ink was dried on my last dot. “Please to put that with my will,” and he looked as though greatly relieved and as if a difficult task had been safely and wisely accomplished. We were bowed out with a cold politeness, a manner that seemed to me to ill accord with the splendid thing I had just done.

In the train he left me alone while he made most of the journey in the smoking-car.

My thoughts would not be controlled and the chains began to chafe already. A black slave in Abyssinia would be freer, maybe happier, than I, a blameless girl, happy as a bird, taken to be put on the gridiron in a way peculiarly known to a miser. His nature was made up of a nepotism picturesque in its purity of access. He did away with any demonstration of

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affection, or preliminary courtesy; all gallantry was eliminated from his course of conduct; for it was natural for him to believe, in his greed, that it would destroy the effect of his sordid compact if it should become apparent to me that I was at all necessary to him.

At breakfast the next morning, according to a habit from childhood, I ordered an orange.

"What!" he exclaimed with a wry face, "when oranges are this price and you can buy half a dozen for that at the stand on the corner!"

I drank my coffee without disputing his wish. Our honeymoon was a new experience to me in the way of economy. My gourmet instincts were being lost in the possibility of getting enough food to satisfy hunger while he argued that all the illness in the world could be ascribed to overeating and lack of exercise.

At the rate we lived, we were prospectively to live forever, for, while fasting, we walked, walked to save our car fare. Then, he frequently complained that I did not pet him or love him, that an old man who expected a young woman to be a wife to him was a fool.

Sight-seeing was his hobby, and any failure of mine to be posted on the history of some monument or building brought forth a long diatribe on my stupidity and natural dullness.

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One day we started for the golf club, but as the car we were on went only half way, and he would not pay another fare, we walked back to the hotel. This was one of many such experiences. Not a word spoken or a silence was endured; not a dress that I wore or an action, or quality, or anything about me that was not constantly criticised in a peevish manner, which at first pained me beyond power of expression. I was never given a moment to myself or voluntarily offered a cent of money by him. That temperament, not purse, makes happiness, is true, but to make the object of existence economy, is to warp one's very soul. One loses a great deal in life by shutting one's eyes to everything but money.

Ill treatment suggests passion of some sort rebelling in its dying struggles.

Humor was entirely lacking in our intercourse. The light witticisms and airy nothings that made others laugh put my husband in a bad temper, and instead of an amused audience I had a soured critic. He would say that I had no idea of truth, that exaggeration was second nature to me; when both sides would open fire, and my playfulness nearly always ended in hearing the old tune — that I never had anything until I was married.

The folly and injustice of this taunt caused me more unhappiness than anything when I recalled the kind indulgence of my father. Besides, to one of my

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nature, this treatment could poison more happiness than anything else, but I was helpless against him.

The constant cry of money, money, was beginning to deafen and blind me to all other things in life. The one thing that I had been taught to despise as a vulgar subject for conversation, and a crime to quarrel about, much less to gauge any action by.

The question came to be more where to get the small necessities that make more for comfort than the big things. Money was the daily miracle and my *bête noire*, the cause of my constant despair.

I prayed that I might be left some sentiment for the fine things of life; such as appreciation of the beautiful, a love of poetry and enjoyment of music; sympathy with lovers, cheer at the sight of a rose, or to be calmed by moonlight or aroused by passion, for all these delights were slipping from me. "Do not give me riches, or even let me fall in love, but, O God, keep my heart fresh, with power left to feel. Please, God, do not empty my warm, red heart of desire," was my daily prayer.

The society to which I had devoted myself believed it a man's pleasant duty to decorate the person of his wife with the richness of the earth. It seems to be the primary law of man's nature to emphasize the feminine weakness by crowning her with the laurels won by his strength, and while a man's glory is a reflex of his wife's purity, his main pride, if not the

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object of his life, is that she will be well cared for. The earth, sea and sky even, are searched for beauty that shall be shaped for her adornment. Smoothness, brilliancy, fragrance shall be adapted to her pleasure, ease and luxury. The toil and sweat shall be counted light if they are but the means to this great end — mainly that she be satisfied. Crime committed, passion suffered, agonizing torments suppressed, or the long weary days of thousands of slaves, are an easy sacrifice if that one glorified object has been attained — the smile of milady's approval.

But this was to me a tragedy less dreadful than the fact, which grew hourly in importance, that this man whom I had married never loved me, that he never thanked me for my devotion with even a kind look, but ever acted bored in my presence and lost no opportunity of humiliating me in public, while he persistently refused to go to theatre, balls, dinners, or even small friendly affairs among my few intimates, who began to gossip about his neglect of me.

If on some rare occasion I was persuaded to go out my mind was continually worried about my reception on arriving at home, when it would be necessary to startle him out of a sleep in order to enter the house and have his fierce, bloodshot eyes fastened upon me while I listened to his tirade of abusive language.

"I have had enough of this," he would say. "By



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God, if you want to run about all the time for fun, you can leave my house. You only want me to pay the bills while you let me get along as well as I can. What are you doing out all the time? Who is so interesting that you can never find time to be with me? You had better go back home to your father, he knows how to treat you, and would take a club to you, or turn you out of the house." At such times I would shut my lips and struggle against the quarrel that one word would ignite, as he seemed to revel in that pastime.

That this period of my life was a specifically prepared punishment that retribution provided in payment of the careless days of my girlhood became a fixed idea, and Clifford was constantly flitting into the picture of my mind's quiet moments, from which I took refuge in study, or riding, but it was no good. "Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin." I had married where I did not love, would degradation lower me to the pit where lawless love abides? My guardian Devil must have laughed at the tricks he played at my disillusion.

Two things were denied me that nearly all women not in the poorhouse demand for themselves. It was declared impossible, or rather preposterous, for me to wish for a home of my own, or to expect to have children. He said, "A house is a great care, besides, I have saved many thousands of dollars by not having,

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as you term it, a home; as to children —" he shrugged his shoulders —" they are an unnecessary evil."

As it was in the greater so it was in all the smaller concerns of our daily intercourse. I never allowed an expression of what I wanted to do or have to reach his ears that he did not in some way make an effort to circumvent my plans. If I should happen to particularly admire a trinket, a piece of furniture, or something to wear, he would refuse to get it, so that I acquired the habit of buying things surreptitiously and paying for them out of my small bank account. My efforts to break this rock of defiance by kindness were unavailing. I was still ignorant as to what it was that made some men dance to any tune their wives might pipe.

An old friend of my youth with whom my confidence had always been shared, and whose generous heart never failed to grant me some peace, once said to me: "Know a man's boyhood before you judge him, for the peccadillos and idiosyncrasies that are molded in wax in our youth become the copper die of our old age. From one harbored thought or mean wish you may be laying the keystone of endless pain or pleasure to countless generations. Sweep your own temple clear, then you will not be troubled about other people's steps."

We are all slaves of circumstance. It is useless to talk of these things; for no one man or woman has



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suffered so much, in a hell so deep, that he can understand all the circles of Hades that different mortals must traverse before reaching the Great White Throne, where no sorrow is but only peace, and nothing is known of a honeymoon. Honeymoon, indeed, rather a misnomer for a new inferno, with a husband for one's guide and "friend."

CHAPTER XXIV

*"The woman felt homeless; and childless, in scorn
She seemed mocked by the voices of children unborn.
And when from these sombre reflections away
She turned with a sigh to that gay world, more gay
For her presence within it, she knew herself friendless;
That her path led from peace, and that path appeared
endless;
That even her beauty had been but a snare,
And her wit sharpened only the edge of despair."*

* * * * *

*"Curled lips, long since half kissed away,
Still sweet and keen,
You'd give him poison — shall we say,
Or what?"*

— *Faustine.*

SORCERIES of Thessaly, the troubles of the Golden Ass, the mysterious Pastophares! Ah, God, what pen can describe the slimy pool into which a young woman may fall who is yoked to a Silenus trunk that is swollen with drink and high living.

Besides this, the degrading thought that I belonged to a man in the same sense as any other property

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might that he bought, made me slink into dark corners of regret, and desire for death. There was no redress — my body and soul belonged to him, I could not by law or religion break the seal that fastened that smirch in my soul. Chained for life to a criminal in jail might seem to the free man a terrible punishment, but he does not think of looking at his neighbor as possibly a pitiable object of mercy, because he wears fine clothes, and drives in a carriage.

“Your large, healthy magnetism has a double-soled wearing quality that cannot be said of most of your kind who have gone through the mill,” he said once to me in a manner peculiarly his own; “the young men will be after you, your freshness will allure them all, but a woman of your character is not so much to be feared.”

To this I candidly replied: “You have not referred to my amiable disposition that you constantly praise as a buffer to your natural ill temper,” for even during our courtship I remember that he gave me credit for an unprecedented patience with his taunts which it was impossible to realize the value of then, but a never-ending criticism of one's behavior becomes at last as an acid upon a tender sore — it aggravates the disease it was intended to cure.

My social duties that seemed obligatory, were one of the hardest bones of contention. Coming home late from a course of pink teas, he would look at me

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in a way to terrorize the fearless, when the glaucous, opaque tint of his black eyes would become more yellow, and the heavy, animal face all the more forbidding, when he would shout as to one deaf, "Stay at home more or get out of my house forever; I shall not have you running about so." To which one day, tried beyond the power of keeping silence any longer, I retorted: "There are ghosts in this house that sneer at and mock me; the associations of it are abhorrent, it reeks in vile language and brawls. Death seems to haunt it, the colors in it are as much in harmony as we are, and the whole thing is enough to scrape my nerves bare to the bone. The cheap attempts at ornamentation ring so untrue and everything about the house is so harsh that I cannot endure to remain in it for a longer time than to eat and sleep. To live in one room in which I could assert my own individuality would be more home to me than could a palace."

"Do you imagine that I shall make a dude's loafing place for you to preside over? It is good enough for me and will have to answer the purpose for you. What good are all these fantastic gew-gaws that silly women spend time and somebody else's money upon? I want a wife for different purposes than to buy bric-a-brac. You have me, what more do you want?"

I had him! Indeed 'tis well that Love is blind, for blindness is as good a plea as any for the folly committed in Love's name. In my secret heart there



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was a longing to bite the hand that held me in its relentless clutch. Oh, that some nameless deeds might not have their dire consequences and that I might be as conscienceless as a child who pulls flies to pieces as he sings in the sunshine. There is not desert arid enough to wither, or ocean wide enough to swallow up, or space enough to consume one drop of Cain's guilt. My heavy feet and sultry heart must march on to the bitter end. I had longed for love and married for what? There are so many reasons why one marries that it is quite unnecessary to confront any one particularly ghastly fact or reason in connection with it.

My husband often quoted an axiom of Russian origin that seemed to me to be as applicable to one as to the other of us, which was, if you yoke a buffalo and ox together, one will push for the swamp and the other for the hill. Trite aphorisms often come near the truth.

We began to recognize the complete boredom that comes of opposite tastes trying to conform to each other. Spontaneous, fun-loving, cognizant of the beauty and joy in the world, I was mated to a man who could only find satisfaction and interest in a human sale, beyond which he could see no reason for wasting time on anything.

When we are thirsty a thousand pearls are not worth one drop of water. I would have given up

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everything that I possessed for one kiss, or the words, "I love you," or even a bright, appreciative glance or kind word. The mother instinct was beginning to cry out for satisfaction. The powerful assertion of a New England conscience refused all possible opportunity of gratifying this natural craving for recreation that no effort of mine could quell. Neither diversion or occupation had any effect, until, for comfort, reading Nietzsche grew to be a last resource.

"Ye creators, in you is much impure, the reason is that ye were compelled to be mothers. A new child, oh, how much new dirt hath with it been born into the world. Go unto one side. He who hath given birth shall wash his soul pure."

Nature asserting itself, however, the command to "be not virtuous beyond your ability" came as a sacred call. My soul assumed an attitude of humility. The creeping thing that I became to my husband had made of me a slave to one constant temptation — murder. How sweet would be the taste of blood, I brooded, as I sat alone in the iron cage of impotence that my husband bound round me. I was like the woman in a picture, who is chained to a wall, with dangling jewels before her lips and eyes that can not appease her thirst or save her from starving. Children — devils in hell are more satisfied than a woman who is denied them! Nature must assert herself or there is destruction indeed.

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In my girlhood a woman had predicted that, as my chief desire in life seemed to be that of making slaves of men I should beware lest their chains fall later about my own neck. The equation had been worked, the problem solved. In my youthful independence, I had said, "We are the makers of our own destiny." Are we, indeed?

Society now had a flagrant tendency to flout the idea of a woman taking to the dusty, hot road of conjugal duty when her infelicity might be cured in the rosy path of dalliance. Young men were beginning to offer me passion, old men made a show of their money; women averred that there was small chance of judging by what one saw in the drawing-room of the most secret store in the larder. By cares of a house or the humdrum of domesticity a woman may dispossess her nature of a great many temptations, just as a man appeases his surplus energy in making money.

Charity work seemed so futile; I was too old to go on the stage, and too prudish to let my natural self have rein in certain enjoyments that my exuberance might have led me to reach out for if the temptation had been sufficiently strong, but to turn to something for bare comfort became an imperative need. In the modern extravagant sense, I lacked the first requisites for attracting society, for one must have surroundings commensurate with good taste if

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not with great wealth. Happy women are rarely society or club women.

Why not adopt a literary fad of some kind as the last resource, I thought. Literature would answer a purpose, so I finally decided to take up the study of Browning with a class formed of my friends.

After a holy hour spent in dissecting a part of "Pippa Passes," one bleak November day, we drifted, as usual, into that universally interesting topic, man.

"Ought a girl to marry so young? Does she really love, or know about things at eighteen?" asked Dorothy Whitehall, the fiancée of Mr. Bradford, one of the chums of my old friend, Clifford Bennet, who, as is always the case with the average Don Juan, wants to marry the youngest and most innocent girl he can find on the market. Thus youth and old age united make a respectable mean average.

"At eighteen we worship, talk, eat and drink love, but at forty we look for a lover that will not even mention the subject; though at either age I cannot say that we know much about it, for love is a matter that concerns civilization more than it does the individual, after he has passed his calfdom period," answered the leader of our class, who never before had expressed her sentiment on so vital a subject.

There was a scream of dissent at this from the débutanté.

"There is no such thing as love," quickly replied

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a young divorcee, "it is simply egotism, an expression of one's own self to another in order to get back coin of a higher value. It might be considered an insanity, for who but an idiot, or a lover, will say the insane things they do? Then the rash promises they make to each other while suffering from this dementia. 'Do you love me as well as I do you?' asked our waitress of the footman. The reply was the usual one in such cases: 'You could not possibly love me as I do you.' The literal demonstration of this was, that when they were married she sawed the wood and brought in the coal, while he spent nearly all of his wages on drink, or French maids."

The débutanté looked discouraged and subsided for a moment, but astonished us all by an outburst full of pique and retaliation as she cried vehemently to the divorcee who had denounced her holy of holies by a sneer:

"Dolly is so soured on love because her last picture did not get on the line. How absurd for her to think that she can deceive us into believing that she paints her pictures, or writes the books that come out under her name, for Mrs. Merriwether says she hires them done to acquire distinction that society will never bestow."

"The only certain thing about love is that it is not certain," replied the one attacked; "no one can tell how long the fit will last."

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To this Dolly glibly replied: "My brother said once, that you were the strangest girl he had ever known, that as soon as a man proposed to you you lost all interest in him; that you must have had a great many is certain, for you do not care enough about them to even remember their names. What do you say, Kate?" she said, turning to me.

"When a woman arrives on the shady side of the hill, before she reaches that loveless land where really nothing matters," I replied in a manner that showed too strongly a sad conviction, "memory is fixed in the heart, not in the mind, as many believe, for we remember best what most affects our interests."

"Do you believe in marrying for money?" asked Miss Simpson, who nudged her friend as she settled her eyes fixedly on mine.

"Yes, when you enter the land that I just mentioned, but not in your youth, then it is very foolish to, but in any case do not take your heart on the journey, for it will be a great burden, and it really does not pay."

"You and Dolly are too cynical for me, and it is just the girls who don't care, and who talk as you do who make all the trouble with the men so that the girls who want them can't have half of them. Walter Wilbur spoke to me of you one day with tears in his eyes, and you know he went to Egypt to forget."

"Love is the real master of life but, to an old

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bounder like 'Ironclad,' who has had it thrust on her from childhood, it must be the excess of sweetness, which is satiety, and which terminates in philosophy," said Dolly, determined to take the part of her ally. "I could forswear all the love in the world if anyone would give me party dresses like unto hers. This utter nonsense that men and women talk about loving but once shows a most deplorable lack somewhere. I could love a thousand times if there was anyone lovable. Even a dog or a cat can obtain for themselves an enviable devotion from me. I do not want to pose as one of those sapped-out, helpless, useless beings who can only love once, but we are all talking sheer nonsense, for, as I said before, give me the gaudy things of this world; love will come or go as it pleases my heart. I shall not break myself over any subtleties of passion that are beyond my range."

"Not her dress, but that pathetic droop to her eyelid, as if one kiss would make it fall," said Daisy Ward, the romantic one.

"Girls," I cried, above the silly clatter that now waged round me, "I shall not be the subject of any more of this; you know in diplomatic circles we flatter those most whom we most hate."

"Well, wasn't your mouth taken as a Greek model in the drawing class?" persisted Sadie, bent on giving her full quota of praise, against all onslaughts, when gossip was most rife. "We need not wait to enter

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the violet abysses of Eternity to find out that we are famous among our women friends if we only have something better to wear than they. It dawns upon me now that I have always joined the cowardice of grown people with the thoughtless courage of a child. My enemies ascribed my actions to wicked perversity, while those who knew me best and loved me, laid my crimes principally to naïveté. One reason why society has dwindled to afternoon teas for women, or dinners of twelve covers, is that their jealousy cannot endure the competition which is necessary in a general society and that they are so profoundly and unjustly critical of each other."

"Never mind," said Dolly, in an appeasing, sympathetic tone, "I like you, and will tell everybody what a perfect dear you were to nurse the baby so beautifully through his sickness when I was in New York, for the doctor said that you were simply splendid," she continued rapidly.

"My dear," drawled Amy, "I can appreciate you, for we both married wheezy old men who are not blessed with a grain of sentiment. You were a spoiled girl and a great stickler for form, and predisposed to the art of coquetry, in defense of which you built up whole structures of argument, and were unusually qualified for comradeship and mental association with men. You considered marriage only as a deliverance, a divine command and a communion

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of personality. My first lover made me believe that love was a part of the divine embroidery of the heavens that held the stars in their pure empyrean; now that man is married to a woman who allows him to quarrel with her about which side down his hair-brush ought to be if they can't find anything else to allude to, while I now know that marriage for a woman becomes merely a question of whether the man can supply honey and cheese for her bread, which is a moral as well as a physical necessity."

"Amy," I cried, at the open avowal that this indifferent young woman made, which, though it looked to be so sincere, was really a disguise of hers to hide a nature intensely devoted to a cause, or a man, when once her passion or sentiment was aroused.

The chimes in the hall struck five. "We have talked a great deal about Browning, and I propose that we adjourn," said Miss Smith, in the quiet low tones she always used when she was sarcastic.

The girls gave me an effusive good-bye. The day was a sodden gray, and the nervous flutter usual to me about the time my husband was expected home was accentuated while I was taking my things off, as the maid announced a gentleman to see me, and I recognized the name of the man whom I had met in the South some three years before my marriage, and never expected to see again.

CHAPTER XXV

*"The battle is not always to the brave nor life's
sublimest wisdom to the wise."*

TO learn of what jealousy consists, to be inoculated with its poison was now my daily experience. It was not only one thing but everything. To shake hands with a man, to smile at a man across the room, to speak in a low tone to someone, a new dress, an admired flower, even a pet cat, or a study in which there could be found any pleasure or solace, was enough to awaken my husband's suspicion or antipathy. He had many devices for laying on the knots of his displeasure when his spleen was once aroused, which was most of the time I spent with him. To be away from him brought so many bitter complaints against my inexcusable conduct, that to be at a reception past the time when he would expect me to return would bring dire forebodings of meeting him.

A woman once said to me that it did not matter to her what was said, that she could give as good a tongue lashing as anybody. This implied the constant changing of the tide in marital relations that seemed

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to me only fit for the comic papers and small minds, for if there is any significance to life at all, there must be certain things in it, certain phases that we must reverence.

With the psychic intuition of my nature still intact in spite of all, with the usual paramount influence he exercised over me, I felt the presence of my husband in the hall outside. A nervousness quite unaccountable always overcame me when he approached me, and now, to find this stranger from the South calling upon me would surely bring on a storm of vituperation. Inwardly quaking with fear that this man, whom of all others I cared least to encounter or entertain, should probably imperil my very life, certainly was an irony of fate. The appearance of Mr. Colton on the scene might be classed as a red-letter event in a life that daily might have been called melodramatic.

There are, perhaps, only a few married women who have not had an episode or two in their lives, not reprehensible maybe, but that would be best forgotten. My recollection of the brief acquaintance I had with Mr. Colton when we met in the South was anything but agreeable. Knowing well the sly curiosity of my husband, and the braggadocio egotism of this man whose love making was an art and who might become a dangerous enemy if repulsed suddenly, yet to whom any kind of encouragement might write total anni-

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hilation, I realized my danger and stood hesitating, thinking that perhaps a lack of hospitality would make him see his mistake, but no, offering me a chair he took upon himself the honors that, apparently, he did not expect to receive.

Michaelovitch had threatened to drive me out of the house for less reasons than finding a man beside me. This man was handsome; we were alone; it was growing dusk. I stammered something about having an engagement for the evening, and that I would like to be excused. I remembered how that often before we were married Michaelovitch had said that the thing he feared most was that after marriage young men would be more attractive to me than ever, that he feared a rivalry impossible to prevent.

"It has been years since we met; you take no note of my efforts to see you now, but it is no use to try to ignore me. It is certain I shall die fighting for the same little privileges you refused me that night when I plead for hours and kept you standing there in the doorway for a touch of your hand, a smile from your sweet lips, a kind look from your beautiful eyes."

He said this as if reciting a lesson, sufficiently fluent to savor of being long in practice.

His assurance unnerved me and, with an almost frantic gesture, I said, "But I fail to see of what importance this can be to either of us now; there are



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other problems in life for me to encounter than deciding what you think of me."

To which he replied: "Guessing at your meaning I say the right sort of man is never jealous of a beautiful woman — no, no," and he fidgeted in his chair as he held his hands away from him as if repelling the thought that way. "No man who immeasurably loves a woman will desecrate that love by obliging her to publicly announce his brutality, but everyone who ever sees you must love your sweet, radiant nature," he lowered his voice; "your Oriental intensity — ah — the — yes. Can science or philosophy explain why it is that if one once knows you you will never be forgotten? You were with me during one short evening, but that little hour has lived in my memory like sweet music ever since. Your indifference to me is maddening."

Seriously annoyed, I moved away, at the same time saying: "Is this what you made a call on me, a married woman, to say? It is folly and I beg that you will excuse me, if for no other reason than that in all probability I am not the only one who listens to you."

"Yes, yes, we must part, I must go, but only for your sake. But tell me in that queenly way in which you intend to dismiss me, that you have thought of me, if ever so little. I, too, have been married but, peradventure, marriage does not unsex one. A lovely woman is just as admirable a divinity as ever."

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His ravings were rather amusing — after all, it might not be more than an extra experience on the bulletin, but I trembled, for surely that was my husband's step I again heard in the hall. Any slight put upon this man might make an enemy of him for life, to wound his quixotism might prove fatal. "If a woman lives up to the highest mark of her ability or her duty she has quite enough to occupy her time without other interests. Please understand me, you distress me, you must go — you cannot know —!"

"Oh, you are too modest in spirit. I will live to see the fine fibre of your nature respond to the ineffable longing and warmth of affection so sincere and spontaneous that it will surprise even you, my chrysalis, whom I shall warm into life that you may spread your wings to fly straight to me."

"Perhaps," I said mechanically, as each moment became more tortuous, the fear that my husband would tip-toe into the room any moment being the uppermost thought of my mind.

"One kiss of yours would make my life happy. The soft music of your voice thrills me, it opens my heart as no other woman has ever opened its holy of holies. I hear that you are not happy with an old brute who grinds you to powder. You, who can't help being attractive in every way that endears a woman to a man."

Was the man crazy? Could he not see my state

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of excitement, my dread of him, that set every nerve on edge? No, at last it occurred to me that these signs made him believe himself the cause of my hot cheeks, nervously working hands and fitful pacing up and down.

"Some man ought to crown you as he would his patron saint. Why cannot I? No one will ever guard your reputation and honor more sacredly than I, who would offer you everything I have, or ever expect to have, on earth."

Of all the passion and love offered to me this was the most fatal and incriminating. "Do not push me to extremities," I replied, "you are endangering my whole future at this instant. Have you no respect for me that you pursue me, uninvited, in this way?"

"Ah, I read in your eyes the real answer to my pleading. Dearest, let me admire you, let me be your dog, or your best friend. I am Southern, with the hot blood, the spirit of the gentlemen of the South, who have always protected their women. I have never before met a woman like you, you make me mad, forgive me, for I must tell you."

His eyes were becoming glazed with passion that my horror of him did not quell. There was no way to escape; I had no power to stay the torrid flow of his words. This sort of scene had not been endured since I had said good-bye to the old "*vie célibataire*."

"Please accede to my wishes and leave the house at

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once," I said in a whisper, my fear rendering my efforts to remain dignified futile. In the conscientious searching of my life's misery not one willful wrong deed was recorded, but this listening to a man raving out his passion for me I was sure would be the means of my ultimate destruction, for it became the strongest premonition of my life. I had been falsely suspected of many things, this sin would be upon me now. Thank God, I had not come as yet to a guilty conscience. The subtlety of his flattery lay in the fact that for the most part he accredited me with virtues that I did not have, or, at least, that no one else ever saw.

Finally he started to leave me, and as the snowflakes scurried to earth faster every moment my eyes watched them with an involuntary fascination while my thoughts persistently dwelt on him, and the words crushed through my clinched teeth would say themselves in spite of me: "Love, love, bah! I am sick of the word; what does it mean to me; what has it ever brought me? Not love, revenge! only revenge is sweet to me now. By the gods it shall be enjoyed! Only wait." As the adviser of Catherine de Medici whispered that memorable word in her ear when hounded to the wall by a lot of wolves panting for her power and throne, but who yet tried to beguile her heart, I, too, would "wait."

Slowly turning around through the always dreaded,

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potent influence my husband exerted over me both mentally and physically, I saw his spectre-like face as it gleamed ghastly white from out the gathering gloom. His black eyes fairly glittered with a red light that gave a fiendish expression to them, accentuated by the snarl emitted from the thick lips that quivered and curled over his white teeth, and which his anger did not allow him to express in words; the very sight was enough to strike cold, dumb horror to one's heart.

Faintly leaning against the window I stood riveted to the spot, waiting to hear the expected ban or execration; would it never come, why did he stand there in the door looking at me with those bloodshot, hound eyes? The atmosphere always became stifling when he entered the same room where I was. I gasped for breath and turned toward the window. It was not so very many degrees above zero outside, but I would rather lie out there in the street freezing to death than to go through this.

At last it came. This roaring rage was a relief from his silent contempt.

"American women are all liars," he hissed; the sibilant words were like live coals upon my cold, shivering body, "and you are the damnedest liar of them all."

He stood over me with raised hands, met my gaze, then fell back, giving vent to his fury by kicking the

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furniture and throwing the first thing that came to his hand as far as it would go.

Mr. Colton stood still as a statue, never taking his eyes off me.

"How dare you insult me in my own house, and hold me up to public ridicule?"

Mr. Colton stepped to the door and placed his hand upon the knob: "You mongrel cur, stay to hear what I have to say or I will kick you both out together. And what can you be doing in the street all day," he said turning to me; "I have a notion to tell you to get out and never come back. Back, by God, all you want is to have your bills paid and to amuse yourself; you never think of me."

We both talked at once, he never wished to hear what I had to say. "It is all talk, everyone who sees you says how well you are treated, all women are jealous of you," he said.

This was the most powerful weapon he could wield and it silenced me, it was beneath my contempt, for he well knew the best things I had bought since my marriage had been paid for with my own money, which was now at a critically low ebb.

I looked at his satyr largeness of body, the wrinkled face set in a short flabby neck, and I tried to deceive myself, as I did the world, that I had married this man for love. The principal question for a woman is not "Do we marry for love?" but "Do we love

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to be married?" There is a pennyweight of difference until we are actually confronted with the answer.

At this inopportune moment a young woman who was the gossip of the city, and who spent all the time she could give to the ruination of other people's reputations, was announced. She came into the room smiling her wicked smile as she unloosed her sables, with the remark: "Oh, I am so glad to find you both at home. What a snug pair you are to be sure, instead of patrolling up and down to the interminable afternoon teas, boring yourselves with a lot of people, you coo and woo at home."

"Yes, my wife for once stayed at home as I wished her to, but she can't be satisfied with disgracing me outside but must bring her paramours into the house. That is what a man gets for marrying a woman thirty years his junior; American women are all on the bargain counter hunting for titles and I like a fool fell into her trap. I came home to-day to find that cad, that low down duffer, whatever his name is, making love to her in a way that he must have practiced for years to have acquired."

"Mr. Colton, allow me to introduce you to my friend—" I interrupted.

"Oh, is this the Mr. Colton known to fame? Glad to meet you, my name is Miss Gilroy."

Michaelovitch, meanwhile, had sat down, breath-

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ing in long wheezy breaths. I walked to the other end of the room and Mr. Colton came to me and whispered to me: "That man cannot help but brutally insult you, he will turn you out in the street yet, and he has never treated you as a gentleman should treat a woman who is his wife. Beware of him. In case you ever need me come to me, for you cannot easily paint ebony white. Good-bye, this is not the last, for I intend to see you again."

Lila stood still, with the expression on her face of a French doll whose mechanism has run down. Suddenly, as if inspired, she turned and addressed my husband in her chatty, indifferent way. "To be sure, Kate could have married anyone of the most eligible men in America; for there never was anything ill said about her. I have the run of all the gossip in and out of the clubs, and know that not one of the fellows has ever been anything but proud of her acquaintance. You are furious; it is quite delightful to see a jealous man mad. You are picturesque with your savage exhibition of yourself. If I never knew the real phase of men behind the screen I would marry,—as it is I am content with the way I live and with spasmodic efforts toward a result I never allow. Ironclad may be a modern Aspasia but she hasn't that reputation."

I could have blessed her then and forgiven her for what she was, and looked upon her as my friend as

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long as I could serve her, for while my husband knew of my virtue he was loathe to accord any praise in my favor.

"Kiss and make up," Lila said in her flippant little tone, that came from a woman whose life had never been worried by a single serious thought.

It was out of all precedent for us to do anything of that kind, for often on our honeymoon, when inspired to give him a love-tap or a fervent kiss, my husband would say: "Oh, spare me that, if there is anything more disgusting in a wife than such constant demonstrations let me know it." In comparing notes with other young married women this had been all contrary to their experience. At times a pure young woman, as if overcome by the miasma arising from a Serbonian bog, will enter the marriage relation to become in the end a Messalina, and voluptuous.

Apparently Michaelovitch was ashamed of the confession he had made and not wishing to say anything more before Lila, who impressed us with the idea that she intended to remain quite some time, he abruptly left the room.

After he had gone Lila's nervous, bony hand reached for mine as she said: "Kate, I have something to tell you, can you listen?"

"It will be a great relief to listen to some of your interesting gossip instead of the awful things I have been hearing."

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"This is about myself and will be a great surprise. I intend to be married to a man I have only known three days and want you to be one of my witnesses, will you?"

"Oh, Lila! you, with your freedom, to give it up?"

"Kate, I am not the same stamp of woman that you are. I do not long or crave for the things that you do, every man that I meet is the same as all other men to me. If I were you I would have children; a child could be more to you than any man can possibly be to a woman like you. You are not satisfied, we all see the hunger in your eyes. We all love you and fear for you; have you ever thought of what your end will be?"

"Oh, I don't need love; I read or study, have every moment occupied. I am entirely independent."

"Dear, do you think that these things will fill all the room in your heart forever? Do you know that you are being gossiped about on that account? We all ask why he never appears on any occasions in public with you."

"My family are devoted to me, they worship me and I spend the time that some women would with their husbands in making my parents happy, only there is a constant dread of my husband's temper, and the feeling of having no part in the inner life of a man who ought to be my all, my confidant and friend. My reason for going out so much is that if

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I stay at home I sit in one abominably threadbare little bedroom where we practically live, and watch him with a weird fascination that will not let me read, or sing, or do anything else. As he lies on his leather couch I wish that he lay there dead. There would be no sorrow in the bottomless depths of my heart — Oh, Lila, this is awful to tell you but, with his great shaggy brows in a scowl over his fierce black eyes that never soften to a humane expression into mine, the heavily seamed face and wrinkled flabby neck, the bald top of the miser's head and the broad aggressive shoulders as he lies dreaming and mumbling to himself, when suddenly, out of a frightful nightmare his bloodshot eyes, drunk with sleepy fright, fasten upon me in a way that makes me wonder if his wicked intuition scented out the evil and he read the secret thoughts of my lost soul, for there is no high hope, right ambition or lofty idea left in me; I am possessed by the one secret prayer that this may not last forever. At times uncontrollable spasms of self-pity take me beyond myself in a gulf of misery that will run itself out into an unredeemable stony hate of everybody. Then a miserable contempt for my own egotism will come over me and make a sane, hard-working, charity dispensing woman of me, as prosaic as you could find on the shelf of a Presbyterian missionary society. Lila, can you realize what it is to eat, and sleep, and I live in the same room with

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a man whom you are only obliged by law to tolerate?"

The doll-like face of Lila wore a strange expression as she asked: "Is that why you are beginning to be dignified? You no longer say the witty, spontaneous things that used to make us all laugh so. What a great girl you used to be for pets, and what a horse-woman you were; why, you could break any kind of a horse then, but you do not have that kind of a look now. Don't get to be prudish, for land's sake. What you ought to have is a lover. Don't wrap yourself up so completely in the welfare of your husband, for he will never appreciate it, nor will he ever thank you."

"Lila, I can't tell you why, but for two insults deliberately given me in the presence of my friends, not to speak of the daily persecution he has heaped upon me, largely because of my efforts to be kind to him and give him in every instance his way, I am determined upon some sort of revenge. You know we hate the people to whom we are indebted for favors. That is the way with him; every effort of mine has been for his good and his pleasure; he has spit upon me, but thank fortune most people do not know of it while they do know of his mean little soul,—but there, let us never again speak of this, and do remember that above all things you must bury what I have told you. Lila, do not tell it."

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"Tell it! Do you think that you are not now at that stage when you have the pity of everyone? Have you not lived like a boarder in his house and taken his abuse until there are those who think you are a weak imbecile, and who do not respect your amicability?"

"Yes, but my duty lies toward meekness. Not to stand pat would seem a crime against myself."

"Well, all I can say is that the divorce court would be my refuge if I had to deal with what you do, and I would be more able to cope with it because of the difference in our dispositions. I should tell him to go to grass in a way that would hit him between the eyes with a new sensation. I advise you to have children, Kate; but above all, get all the money out of him that you can; and take my cue and boss him, it's the only way to hold a man. A woman who treats a man contemptuously makes him believe that she is a queen.

"Now I must go. You will be a witness at my wedding, won't you, 'Old Ironclad?' Remember, twelve o'clock sharp to-morrow, at St. Christopher's Church, and thank you so much."

Rushing back, as a sudden impulse seized her, she said: "Wait till you see me put my young man through his paces. He has lots of stuff—money, you know, and I shall just live the life my fancy dictates, no long faces for me. Wait till you see some

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of my clothes; look at my engagement ring. Can you guess anything about him? Day, day!"

After closing the door upon Lila I hurried back to the little bedroom off the parlor where Michaelovitch lived, for when not asleep, or taking his meals he always sat there smoking, with a brooding expression on his face. We rarely spoke to each other, for his absent-minded manner, together with increasing deafness made it impossible to exchange lively conversation or to have the heart-to-heart talks that most wives enjoy with their husbands. Now, as was his habit, he sat quietly smoking, only waiting to give me the scathingly sarcastic scolding he always deemed necessary to give me upon entering his presence. As our eyes met my lips closed in frozen terror.

He began his tirade against me by saying: "Is your lover gone? You surprise me by letting him go. It's strange that you can manage to spend a little time with me, but, one thing I will not endure, that is, you shall not disgrace me in my own house. If you persist in this sort of thing you may pack up and leave it forever; and another thing you must not do is to invite those two men, what's their names?"

"Do you mean Clifford and Larnard?" I asked, familiarly using the names by which I had known them since childhood.

"There you go again. Can't you even have enough dignity, in my presence at least, to talk of

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men as you should instead of calling them by their Christian names? To-morrow we shall leave to go abroad. Perhaps in other surroundings you may be hindered from making a spectacle of yourself. Why you should be so ungrateful to a man who is as good to you as I am, is unaccountable to me. See how you have traveled, how you dress; why, you never had a thing till you married me."

Thus, whatever the beginning of the dispute it nearly always ended in this old refrain. The first time that he uttered these words was an experience that I never wish to live through again, and whenever he repeated it my heart prayed to spare me from doing him a violence. Could I still persuade myself to pretend a love for him, or a tenderness that might work out my future salvation? We must all have our day. Surely mine had come; perhaps the poison had not been drunk to the dregs that was necessary before I could hope. What line of action would be safest with a man all suspicion?

Now the miracle was revealed to me.

The problem was at last solved that any bird in the air, any flower that bloomed, the stars which shine or a drop of water that ever joined the eternal ocean could teach.

A companionship where sexual magnetism is the unifying process, that actually makes two individuals one entity and legalizes the union as well as the re-

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creation of that one-ship, whether so acknowledged by the machinery of church, or state, may be termed marriage.

In all the essentials then how my light had failed — and the smoking lamp of doubt smirched the white page whereon was written the pure ideals of the maid. How easily can the word be smudged and inexperience mis-spell the vital word marriage and not know that it is too vile a word to mention!

I envied the women all about me who were contented with their lot. Why could not things satisfy me; why could not wealth take the place of that something that made a gulf between us across which we would never clasp hands, that something in the voice, the eye, that hallowed and lightened every action in the day's routine that otherwise would be mean drudgery. I realized that men, young and old, are ridden by their innate selfishness. The great, all-absorbing fine love that gives itself without asking anything in return seldom comes but once, and few men have the variety of character or genius that can thus love. Love,—if it ever called to me I would respond, though its voice should come from the other side of the world. It takes the everlasting changeableness of a noble woman to be kind to the whole world and it is a faculty too near divine to ever ruin society by its universality.

The following day I determined to see Clifford and

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telephoned him with the hope of making an appointment, but his man said he was not at home. Unable to remain longer in the house with this accustomed nervous fear upon me, I put on my hat and went out. If only Clifford could talk to me or tell me what to do,—yet, what was there to do? I felt that I was standing on a quicksand of peril that might engulf me at any moment.

While walking on, with this dreadful foreboding at my heart, I recognized the quick, springy step of Clifford at a short distance away, who in his towering strength was making straight for me, and the thought of how happy he would make some woman framed itself in my mind, coupled with a regret that this had not dawned upon me when it might have been an advantage to me.

“Come with me, girlie, for a long walk, for which you are such a good companion.”

The tone of his voice alone brought cheer to a sad heart. Clifford's personality was apt to elicit a confidence from women, which made him particularly dangerous to their happiness. “We must be alone a while, Clifford, for you must give me advice and comfort. Some day you may have to give me legal aid, but if you now could only help me regarding matters between my husband and myself it would be a tremendous favor.”

“Come to my office, then, any time you appoint,”

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he said in a cheery voice that was meant to disarm me.

"You may guess how I dislike to go to your office and be stared at and wondered over by all those young office employés, who know me by sight."

"Come up to the apartment, then; no one will see you, that is, none of the gossips who might criticise you; you will be perfectly free from being overheard, too, and we can talk to any length. Come up now, and see if we can't make you happier, for happiness certainly should be your share in life. I will do all in my power to help you."

Hot flashes of remorse passed over me as I pushed the button of the automatic elevator. We talked glibly as we stood on the threshold of his bachelor quarters and entered. He looked at me with a smile as he took off his overcoat and offered to help with my jacket.

To which I protested, "Let us just go in this ante-room, for I must be back home in a few moments. I can not stay long."

Michaelovitch held me pinioned as a fly on a pin, yet there was no telling what my efforts to free myself might not accomplish. With the contrariness of his choleric, bilious temperament, abrupt but bold in the conception of a project, he was inflexible and dauntless in its execution when once he had decided. Whether he divorced me, or prevented me from divorcing him, he would surely take the course least

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agreeable to me. The weight of power would be on his side. The awful odds against me made my life a constant game the excitement of which daily became more alluring.

When Clifford learned of the conditions of my marriage and of the contract he said, "That can be broken, the court would see the injustice of it. Surely we can arrange all that, only we must talk it over together. It would be a long, bitter war, and your reputation would suffer in any case, but the fact that he has so flagrantly taken advantage of you, and a mean one at that, will be in your favor. I rather advise you not to bring suit against him at present but to try bringing him into a proper conception of what he ought to do for you. It is strange that a man would want to take a woman in so badly — but perhaps I will say something to regret if I keep on, for this is the most atrocious thing that I ever knew; an old man with the disposition to make you suffer every known wrong, not giving you any money, and above all, this last insult. It's preposterous, but all old men are so, they overreach themselves in these matters.

"Oh, Kate, why did you do it, you were of age and you must have known that if you sign papers there is nothing to do but to abide by the results,— there is the bell. If it is Larnard you had better go into this bedroom and wait, for there is only this one door out of the apartment. Stay there till I call you, don't make

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any noise,—sh!” It was Larnard. Fearing some other intrusion that might more nearly jeopardize my reputation I fled toward the door.

“Here, here,” cried Clifford, in a suppressed but excited whisper, “there is no outlet but into my private office, I will tell you when they are gone.”

He just had time to shut the door and straighten up when the men, who were old boon companions, entered, and I sat breathless in the bedroom, not daring to move; for the rustle of a skirt, a cough or a sneeze would have betrayed me. I could hear distinctly every word that was said. As a prisoner one is not, perhaps, a self-imposed eavesdropper, but they soon began to gossip and when they mentioned my name I listened intently in order to catch every word, though it did not take very long for me to feel guiltily wrong in my curiosity to know what was said; especially when I soon discovered that I could see every motion, even every expression on the faces of these men reflected in a mirror set in the wall opposite the door connecting the two rooms, the transom of which hung at the exact angle to take in that portion of the room.

CHAPTER XXVI

*"Wild wedlock, and the lusts that bleat and low,
And marriage fodderniffed about by kine."
— Swinburne.*

"CLIFFORD, have you any brandy to hand a man?" asked Larnard as he flung himself into "the smoker," as they called the largest arm-chair of the apartment.

"Of course, I have," replied Clifford.

"Well, please give me a pony, quick."

"It's good to have you sitting by,
Old man, to prove the world no botch;
To shame the Devil with your eye,
And — pass the Scotch."

Quoted Clifford and added, "You are not yourself, old chap, you are worrying about something, surely there is no truth in this story about a marriage that I have heard whispered. You, above all people, are not going to be commonplace and stick your head in a matrimonial noose at this stage of the game, and at your time of life? Besides, if any contracts hold

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good surely ours ought to, for we have led this bachelor, bacchanalian life now for — well, say a few years, that have been marked by supreme satisfaction to both of us. What does this sudden rush mean? Just contemplate, what would happen if one of us married? Why, old man, you put a face on you that would draw a smile out of a Dutch gargoyle," laughed Clifford, trying to conceal the sadness in his heart at the thought of parting from his friend, yet before whom he was determined to appear content. "But who is she, old man? I thought you could never love any girl but dear Old Ironclad, whom we all wanted to marry."

"Why couldn't Ironclad have taken one or the other of us, then we could all three have lived together in a nest that would have put any dovecot to shame by comparison. But Cliff, do you ever think of marrying, have you ever seen any girl other than Ironclad you thought you could love?"

"No, Larnard, you go your way, I shall not marry now or ever; someway it seems to me to be my conscientious duty to be a sort of guardian to Ironclad, for if her hot-headed, impulsive nature is once roused, no man can predict the end. She is no more married to that man, in the true sense of the word, than a zebra may truthfully be said to be mated to a horse. She is stabled with Michaelovitch, who is a good enough fellow in his way, with social position that she thought

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would accrue to great advantage to her. But she sees her hopes crumble one after the other in the iron, aggressive hand of her master; while she is subjected to his penurious nature that counts the cost of everything in a miserly way, and his cruelty in subjecting her to his capriciousness, together with the Cossack neglect and unconcern of a man who stops short of nothing if it will increase his own advantage. With her temperament, she will grow desperate and there is no knowing what she will do. Her parents are too credulous in believing what is told them by their daughter, whose pride enables her to lie by saying that she is happy. I have constituted myself her watchdog, let her husband touch her if he dare. But you have not yet told me about this new crime of yours. What will they say about it at the club when they hear of your self-annihilation?"

"Oh, they are all too busy now talking about my putting Tamora Second in to-morrow's race. But the two year old promises great things, selling five furlongs, but the races are not what is bothering me. I am in a devil of a row with Nina because of this matrimonial venture, as if that of itself was not enough for one time. With her retriever instinct she makes it very uncomfortable for me, yes, by Jove, or would for any man with any independence! How she gets at the facts in my life is a wonder, for she does not see anyone but me, and I surely never tell

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her anything. What fools these women are to think because we cannot always be in their arms lipping love-talk that we are to blame for all their troubles. How to get the pelf to live upon they think is solved in Heaven. I have sold most of my pictures and plate and no one knows or could imagine the straits I am now in to procure a few paltry dollars to settle my necessary debts. Marriage is my last resource and it is as distasteful to me as it is to Nina. I never saw a woman care as much as she does, poor little thing; she really does love me, she calls me absurd pet names and has a special mode of her own in the flattery line that is yet to have its like chronicled.

"Nina is a fetching, quiet, lovable little girl and I do not want to be dogged mean, but it has to come. She says that I haven't a conscience, it were a God's mercy if I had not. I have choked it off enough, and I have treated all my women well. Nina has been kept in good style and now she fights like a tiger, or as though she were a thankless child. Women make all the trouble in the world; wife or mistress, they are all alike. They make a mistake in not improving their variety or making themselves more companionable, then we would be accessible for reform."

At this juncture Larnard looked at his immaculate linen, his dress suit just from Pool's (a dress suit has a language of its own), the patent leather pumps, openwork silk stockings, the priceless pearls in his

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shirt bosom, and the contemplation reassured him. In a quandary he contemplated the manicuring of his nails.

"Are you exactly a competent judge of that?" asked Clifford, naïvely. "Look at Ironclad, for instance, where do you get another like her? If you read fifty-two volumes of Balzac and George Eliot and tumbled their heroines together you would throw them aside as inadequate to describe her, eh? She is capable of making a dupe of a man, which is not commendable, but I would bet on her every time."

"Yes, Ironclad is a species of Amazon, a sort of social caryatides impossible in the ordinary drawing-room sense, but for that reason all the more fascinating."

"You see, Lar, you are not the proper person to make statements about women, for you do not allow them to give out their finest points to you. Women are finely discriminating. The purest woman can delude you into thinking her bad, if necessary, while a bad woman can play the propriety act best of all. Few of them have brains, if they did the race would become extinct and the command of the Lord would fall flat. A woman does not need to learn a man by rote, she divines him before he has found out what her name is. It's a mixture of God and the Devil in them that makes the Nina class so palatable, just as some of us like vinegar sweetened in our salad. Not

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in love with a man, a woman sees through him as effectually as if this solid flesh was but a misty veil that fell over his soul merely as a remedy to an evil, not as an actual barrier, for some of us would hardly court the possibility of wearing our souls naked before the world; some of them would be a 'leetle' ghastly for the drawing-room, eh?" He took a pull at the brandy and soda before he added, "For the best of men is a man at the best."

There were a few moments of silence. Clifford smoked harder than ever, before he began again, in a manner as though about to demonstrate a difficult problem in Euclid to a newly matriculated student: "It's this way, a girl is not allowed by society to make the choice, and as long as conventional society insists upon one brand a large per cent. of men will cut loose from their trammels. If a woman could be a human octopus with possibilities to meet more emergencies, instead of simply looking at life with the business proposition of marriage as an occupation, we men would be far more inclined to fall in line with the respectable element. Look at Ironclad, how she saw the world first and then settled down with the handcuffs upon her wrists and that one-sided old bear locking up her sunny nature in his ice-bound conservatism. The decorations on his breast were more to her than his heart. It was just like him to retire from diplomatic circles when he married so that he could lock

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her up as he would a jewel, to prevent her from entering a world that would fit her personality like a glove. He will gloat over this exclusive possession of her for a while, then they will both tire of each other under their strained relations as his surveillance becomes more and more police duty, when I predict a worse explosive than Russian dynamite will destroy that family. Do you remember what I said to you when I first met her? There is an aristocrat, exquisitely bred but over-educated; her refinement is too fine for society, so she will either retire from its vulgarity or enter it to lead in the worst phases of its vices.

"In this Donnybrook of bad men," said Clifford, "women are all angels with a moral pulchritude which is a stickler for you, who aim at a woman as though she were Siva the destroyer, and, as we abhor those whom we have injured, you treat women with prurient injustice, a dangerous defect, but a common one. I believe there is nothing more material than a thought, a thought is a terrible tribunal, for we are constantly affecting others, or being affected by the thoughts or hypnotic influences of those with whom we come in intimate contact."

"Yes," said Larnard, "and we see strange effects wrought by a magic hard to account for, there are degrees of magnetism. If there ever was a current that affected me more than another it was that lightning conductor Ironclad, and to think of her beautiful

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body thrown on that ash heap of Russian depravity. If a noble and nude antique work of art, taken from Greece, had been brought here to be remodelled in modern clay exuded from Heaven, or the abysses of Hell, then animated with life and rigged out in gew-gaws which she neither values nor needs to enhance her beauty, it could not exceed the beauty of dear Old Ironclad."

"By the gods, Larnard, you have it worse than any of us," said Clifford.

"No, but there is something about her that bites into a man like a beast and won't let go. How I am ever to forget her God knows, and the strange part of it is that the very presence of my fiancée cuts her sweet image into my heart deeper by the very contrast to the inane face of my bride to be, with those passionate eyes, full of feeling and sympathy, enough for a thousand women. When I see and realize how instinctive, or animal, or mercenary, love is unless connected with some fine or generous impulse, I am sure that without such influence it will lead a man to hell."

"Larnard, if you feel this way what will be the outcome if, as you say, the mere momentary satisfaction is a delusion. Have you thought of all this in regard to this hasty marriage of yours?"

"Cliff, old pal," said Larnard, as he leaned over in a deeply confidential manner begotten of much brandy

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and soda, "I have a great deal to regret but I shall not worry about it. Money is a sponge that washes away many a bitter recollection from the slate that tabulates a man's score with women. However, this moralizing does no good, I feel as tired as if I had been sawing wood. If you continue to have this effect upon me my high prelate must do the work himself, not discharge his duties onto pontifical shoulders, for I can see the purple reflection over my clothes of your high church, pre-lenten ideas."

"As you are about to be married, arguments naturally come to mind that make us each use the other as a confessional. The deuce though, with your success among women, to yoke yourself for life to one. Well, my next party will be your hymeneal banquet. Wish you joy and a honeymoon that I hope may last forever."

"A day, you might say, for we shall have to be together constantly and how the devil I shall ever pull through is a quandary, for if my wife is anything like my bride-elect she will be a last chapter in an uninteresting book. She isn't like Ironclad, who is a girl off whom moods drip as dew off a rose, all full of perfume and summer, with her lusty, passionate youth."

Both men were silent, ashamed, in a measure, of this constantly recurring thought about a woman

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whom neither had any right whatever to cherish in his heart in exactly this way, let alone to discuss. Clifford picked up an edition de luxe from the table, conspicuous for its white binding and gold lettering. "This is her new book, which you have not seen, listen to this:

" 'The very richest prize that a man can have is a woman who loves him so that in fact she is a very part of him; that their lives become not only a beating of two hearts in unison, but that her very being is entombed within his. The man may bruise her soul till it aches, she only calls it a delight, a love pang.'

"Think of a woman who could write that, who was born in the sun at some fervent moment when two souls fluttering in golden ether kissed and conceived, being bound to an iron mask like Michaelovitch. Think what she is suffering; think how her conscience must lash her, she who has lived in dreams finally to awaken to such a reality. But, how romantically silly we are and what tommy-rot we talk."

"The viaticum of marriage is resignation. I suppose she has learned that lesson, as everyone else does in the world who marries."

"Lar, I would like to see this woman who can be so foolhardy as to give herself into your keeping, old boy. It seems strange to me that you want to be

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de-oxygenized so soon, for no one can predict what is in store for a man when once he is started on the marriage toboggan."

"Well, be that as it may, to my mind we have drooled over the question long enough and I must go, for Cornie telephoned me to meet him at the club, so, good-bye, old chap."

Clifford sat with a lingering smile on his face, satisfied with himself that he was not so foolish as to want a woman to set up his Penates for him. He wanted to feel that some woman was willing to eliminate herself in him, but he knew his own mind and decided that to marry her would be to destroy the illusion; it would be too much like putting a bird to roast with its plumage on. "Marriage is the funeral pyre of a woman's soul," he thought. Suddenly he was aroused from his reverie by the opening of the door and he looked up to see his old friend Walter Wibur, whom he supposed was still in India.

"Clifford," said Walter, after their greeting, "I have just come home from my tour abroad and the first thing I heard of was Kate's marriage to that old reprobate, that sweet smelling moralist, that smiling diplomat, high in social position and old in years. Cliff, for God's sake, why didn't you stop it; why didn't some of you make her see what she was doing, or why didn't you let me know about it? Her nature has idealized him, it would be impossible for her to

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imagine him. Oh, how he will tramp her in the dust with his iron heel. Can't you see it, or won't you see it? Why couldn't she have married any one of us, for any of us would have made her happy?" and he buried his face in his hands as though to shut out the awful picture that his excited mind had painted. Clifford's friends were always coming to him with their griefs, for most of his friends knew that his soft heart buried many a secret that would go to the grave with him unrevealed.

"Why, Walter, sit down, one would think you were dictating the latest war news from a besieged city. There will be plenty of time. We have all been staunch old friends of Ironclad, but the man who interferes with, or criticises, a girl's marriage simply kicks against the pricks, hurting himself and doing no good to the girl. You know the old saying about 'If a woman wills;' etc. Further than that the Bible proclaims how even God fails to interfere, as the story of our sweet fallen Eve will testify. Man has ever been gulled by woman; now, be a man and don't cry over spilled milk, or a married woman, it's all the same."

"But, Clifford, she is so young and pure at heart; didn't we all worship her for that? Can she possibly fall to the slimy depths into which he will take her? I can picture her prodded to madness by his neglect, jealousy, incapacity and penuriousness. Her mind

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is so superior to his that she cannot conceive of the degradation into which she may fall."

"For God's sake, hush up, man, for you have stirred up the embers of a lot of thoughts that are smouldering in my own breast," said Clifford as he sank back in his chair, with his drooping body collapsed in utter dejection, and I saw a greenish pallor overspread his fine features as he said hoarsely; "No, it should not have been, but we men could do nothing against a woman's determination to take the one solemn step of her life."

"No, Cliff, but why is it that we all feel that some tragedy has been enacted before our eyes?"

As I heard these men speak of me in this way I realized that they had been as strangers to me, and that I now looked upon their real selves for the first time.

"Here, my boy, cheer up and take a bracer, think no more about it. Women are all puzzles; Balzac says they are all liars; we thought to have our queen with us always, a selfish idea for a lot of inconsequential club dwellers like ourselves. Joy be to her, drink deep and long."

At this Clifford filled up the glasses from which they drank bumpers of brandy without looking at each other, for Walter seemed keenly ashamed of his emotion as he made an excuse for his hurried departure. I could imagine him rushing, with that imperturbable,

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headstrong stride of his, amid the crowds of people who all wore their usual stolid street expression. Walter's great jaw, set like a bulldog's, his huge shoulders and towering height made him always a noticeable figure, but my sympathy could never, I knew, lessen a misery that I shrank from ever again contemplating.

Clifford, at last left alone, sat still in the light, looking like a grim, pale statue, and I knew we would each, now hesitate, in meeting one another.

Opening the door and coming into the room I whispered, "They have all gone now and I must hurry home, too. With such a narrow escape as this how dare I ever come again?" I asked of Clifford, to which he replied:

"Never again will this happen. I will arrange it so that we will be as secluded as if in the desert. The first plunge is the worst and now that we have had a scare it will be easier."

"Good-bye, Clifford, I will send the papers, or come with them myself. Good-bye, till to-morrow."

I hurried home, my heart filled with excitement at having overheard three men who were my champions praise me behind my back in this generous and splendid manner, which gave me a new joy unhinted at in all my life before. To be well thought of and to find that my position did not lower me in their eyes made my blood fairly tingle with delight.

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In my desert loneliness, a beautiful oasis had suddenly sprouted into existence as I had discovered that three of my oldest friends stood by me with such whole-souled determination. While sinking in a slough of despond, suddenly there came the sunshine and the safety of genuine friendship. Now I should fear nothing, and, as I entered into my husband's presence with a smile of real happiness to meet his glowering looks and usual question of "Where have you been?" I seemed to have a new prop towards independence in which there was a feeling of safety, and my answer was not fraught with the old terror as I answered, "I was just out for a walk, dearie." The tone of this, with an accompanying kiss reassured him, for he replied:

"I thought maybe you were in mischief as you did not say where you were going. You had better pack up, for I expect to sail for Europe the latter part of the week."

What would I do now? At my first opportunity I telephoned Clifford that we were obliged to sail for Europe and would likely remain in Paris; to which he replied, that he thought of going over there himself as he had business that had to be attended to immediately. I was glad that he could not see my face as he said this, and I sent up a prayer that the inventor of that lover's salvation, the telephone, might have special license in Heaven to the last Eternity.



CHAPTER XXVII

*"Passionate particles of dust and sun,
Run your brief race, nor ask why it is run —
We are but shadow pictures, voices, dreams,
Perchance they make and break us — just for fun."*

THE excitement of getting ready for so long a journey took away some of the embarrassing features of our lack of desire to have communication with each other, and the affectionate demonstration or the light banter engendered by real companionship.

Clifford came to see us off, and to my great surprise Michaelovitch, when shaking hands with him said, "Write to us, young man, and when you come across drop in to see us. I shall rent a hotel in the Champs Elysées, but we will not entertain or go in for that sort of thing at all, but just receive a few old friends, like yourself."

This good humor on the part of my husband, who rarely showed any civility to anyone outside his field of diplomacy, encouraged me to add to his invitation: "We shall take particular pains to admonish you if

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you show the white feather by retreating into your old bachelor shell."

There are always the regulation types that sail on every ship to the other side. There is the family taking its first trip; the old man checking off his seventeenth time across; the giddy young wife of the irascible old man; the group of American girls just out of school chaperoned by a teacher; the flirtatious bachelor and the prim old maid; the man who never takes his eyes off a book and the man who is always taking exercise, or the braggadocio at the table, who monopolizes conversation, and, of course, the gambler who works the habitués of the smoking-room. Then, there is always a pair or two of lovers on board, whether young or old, and they particularly accentuated on this voyage, it seemed to me, the horrible emptiness of my life. The spooning young bride and groom, with their adoration and youthful exuberance, were innocent objects of my jealousy.

Could there be any more hope now, I would ask myself as the silent, deserted deck would attract me at night to sit alone with my thoughts. Would we two be obliged to live together through all the long years of our lives with this jealousy that put its iron heel so miserably in our happiness? Oh, no, the landslide of fate takes away any possibility of making a fixture of one's destiny. Patience — a life of usefulness alone can bring happiness as it comes from within. Aim at,

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clutch hold of the good, and drive away these grinning, horrible ghosts that whispered their dread secrets in my ears waking or sleeping, and who would have me do their bidding. No, only the unselfish could acquire peace of mind, and my whole soul was ground down by the quest of that which is illusive,—and in spite of myself the thought of Clifford would come to my mind; he would help me against myself. He had depths of character unrevealed, even unacknowledged by himself. The one fane in which he had bestowed his most consecrated secret—love, a pure sweet love that my hard nature had not appreciated when it was offered, was now sealed. The delicacy of his attitude toward me ever since did more toward making me feel what he might have been to me than any other thing. For, no matter what would be his lure in the future, whether all unworthy or no, he would have been as a Greek, who kneels to the most distant God, because his very nature was to worship what was farthest removed. In every man's life there are hidden chambers of which he does not allow even his own soul to be intrusive. As I sat in my chair listening to the steady hiss and swish of the waves in the still dark nights, all these thoughts came upon me as a soothing dew falls upon a parched rose after the glare of noonday.

Some women would have fawned a pretended passion upon a man like Michaelovitch; they would have

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flattered his vanity and won from his pride a certain recognition, but his mercenary nature that wished to parade me as a "belonging" and made me sensitive beyond belief caused me to withdraw my antennæ in alarm. No, it was as impossible to make a public exhibition of a feeling that did not spring from my heart as to force an appetite that had already been satiated. My moral nature was impregnable to the thought of such a form of prostitution.

Thoughts of Clifford were beginning to be persistent. He was too timid in the matter of self-assertion ever to compromise me, which gave me a satisfaction that a hot-headed pursuit would have rendered impossible, if it would not, as in the other cases, have rendered necessary the breaking off of the acquaintance entirely; for I had not yet reached the stage of European propriety standards of married women and their lovers. Affection from my husband was assuredly denied me, but the game of life is so difficult in that regard that few there are who receive the highest prize. We love, or are loved, but we seldom have both for long. It was all a very romantic subject to dream about.

The truth was leaking out of our marital unequal match, for Lila had written a steamer letter to me in which she spread a tone of pretended friendship over her exultation at my foolishness, as she expressed it, in marrying a foreigner. Women give a Friendship

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that is often a pretense, as one will give a dog a poisoned bone. What bitter tears, what fierce resentment this letter caused, what new hatred in my heart against the man who could deliberately lay his hand upon me to destroy me! Can a woman ever really learn to love the man who must only be the master to lead her by a chain? Ugh! How to take his throttling hands off my throat; how to come away from his evil nature that was corrupting my heart, and how to rid myself of hate, revenge, infidelity even, for did I not wish with all my soul for Clifford's sympathy, did not his glance make me happy?

Bosh, what a lot of useless thoughts! What did they mean? Could they buy bread, or clothes, let alone yachts or automobiles? What could sympathy, or love be to me now, or why should I so everlastingly chafe against a choice I had deemed wisdom? Clifford was possessed of the New England conscience that cannot abide swerving an iota from the plumb-line of rectitude marked out for it by a long line of ancestry, and neighborly adjustment of morality. Would he retreat into his shell, only to add a zero to a blank page? Would he scorn me if he should ever suspect the truth that was dawning on me day by day? He was not the kind to show the white feather by agreeing with a consensus of opinion about any other subject in the world than that of women; how would it be with that one?

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"No one would ever give Clifford credit for striving with an attack of well regulated conscience," Larnard had once said to me, but Clifford's conscience was the great tribunal before which my little culprit heart now quailed in an agony of suspense. Off in a sadly neglected, cobwebby corner of my mind where once had sat in dignified pomp my ideal lover, there was beginning to appear something tangible that any day might grow to be an overmastering love for Clifford. This instant that thing must be choked, and thrown down to Lethe.

"Come, come," said the gruff voice of my husband at my side. "Don't make yourself ridiculous by staying out here all alone. You do like to be theatrical and inspire criticism; why can't you have some consideration for me before these people?" So we went below.

The miserable journey finally ended and we settled in Paris without delay. As it was out of season and we did not entertain I was much alone. He habitually fell asleep just after dinner, which was a simple meal, served by one servant. Thus in solitude that the grim, musty old hotel made most desolate with its tattered elegance of a bygone day, my evenings were spent in reading. What are the real problems in life, what does anything matter, became the constant question in my mind that circumstances obliged to be entirely self-centered. If I had been able to brush

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Aladdin's lamp and used its magic, what would everything in the world be to me? It was impossible to want anything. Clothes, jewels, position — what were these to one starving for the priceless things in life! My daily philosophy had reached the point where lies indifference. Yet I neglected no duty, nor abandoned my former studious habits that only left me an empty heart and a tired brain, but the disposition to sing was gone, the bird in my throat had flown away, or was dead. My friends ceased to ask me to sing. The one thing left to me that made me forget myself was to walk or drive about the streets of Paris with their eternal surprises and never ending shops, so fascinating in their bewildering variety. If only I could be with Clifford, with his jolly wit, what a Heaven!

These thoughts persistently pursued me, until one day while driving in the Bois, from whence it always seemed the shops and busy boulevards were more distracting, in passing a café, I thought I saw Clifford's familiar face and, ordering the coachman to turn back, I alighted. Who was that man sitting at the table? Could it be Clifford? No, surely he would have sent us word; if he had not,—ah then—. This was the hour when the men on the Bourse came to this café to sip absinthe. Could it be he had but just come?

A charming curio shop next door to the café was what I had been looking for. With a furtive glance at this man, but with a studied dignity I walked into

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the shop, where, under pretense of buying an antique candelabrum in the window, I could with impunity feast my eyes on his beloved curly head. That wave of the hand as he threw away his cigar ash, and the nervous twitch of the third finger, I would recognize anywhere. He held his eye-glasses on his thumb; so he could not have recognized me at this distance.

The purchase could not be prolonged indefinitely and Clifford had as much the appearance of being a fixture as if he had been a wooden Indian. What was so interesting him in Paris? In this neighborhood, and with that impenetrable look! What had happened to him?

For a while we stood. Like two beasts at bay in the desert, with a long look at each other that ends in a cry, which is all they need for mutual recognition, so Clifford and I looked until our eyes satisfied themselves, and Clifford, as if awakened, was his natural self in an instant, while I tried hard to be self-controlled as I suddenly regained my voice.

"The violet fragrance which I always associate with you attracted me first some little time ago when you passed me," he said, as he threw away his cigar. He spoke with a boyish gladness that made me nervously happy. It was very hard to appear indifferent under the interested stare of Clifford's brown eyes. We were too contented in each other's society to dwell on the facts of my position, if indeed it was

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mentioned. Clifford always kept the brakes on in a masterly way that excited my complete respect, if not admiration.

After a rapid fire of questions, which Clifford as rapidly answered, he said, "Now, let me get my breath and ask when you will be visible to your friends."

"If you will give me your address I will telephone to you. Will you come?"

"Yes, I will come," he promised, and we concluded our short visit, for if Clifford and I should be caught talking together in the street by Michaelovitch, I would be frightfully compromised. Hurriedly driving home, a light rag-time kept gaily sounding in my ears to the light click, click, clickety-click of the cab horse. Upon reaching the house I gave the *cocher* a piece of coin, the pin money for a month, that made him shout his thanks profusely till the big iron door clanged behind me. These symptoms were new to me, what did they mean? Why! a week ago nothing in the world seemed of any value to me, now the world seemed a resplendent place, full of joy, and in some way, like a song that one cannot forget, my heart happily kept repeating over and over again: "Clifford is in Paris, Clifford is in Paris, he has come, he and I will meet."

CHAPTER XXVIII

*"Like a tune that runs in the head,
And forces all things in the world,
Wind, rain, the creaking gnat and stuttering fly
To sing itself, and vex you, though perhaps
A pattey tune that you never liked,—or, c'est l'amour?
We're made so, not so much tyrants to ourselves,
As unwilling we are slaves to nature."*

IF ideas of reflection must be preceded by ideas of sensation then Clifford was useful, for the thought of him had awakened a pleasure within me, as the time approached for his coming, that I had deemed but yesterday as impossible. I had tried to while away the time by reading poetry. A copy of Swinburne lay near at hand, and while my whole nature had changed to a fearfully over-wrought condition of nerves not adapted to the old-time keen enjoyment of such exotics in literature, a certain effect of the words, as I thought of Clifford, gave me new life, and I threw down the book and dropped into a deep revery.



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“ Kiss me with some slow, heavy kiss,
That plucks the heart out at the lips.”

A tentative feeling that there was, perhaps, a positive danger in receiving Clifford partly added to the pleasure and excitement of his anticipated call, for, Michaelovitch was suspicious by nature, and he felt that he had discovered me in an unforgivable, reprehensible fault with Mr. Colton. The servants had been set to watch me, not one of whom seemed glad to take part in the disgraceful espionage. While it aroused all the resentful fires of my nature, it brought out in vivid colors to my moral sense the awful fact that very likely I would not so bitterly take umbrage at some of his words that stung like nettles with ever recurring pricks to my conscience, if I had been perfectly innocent.

He had cried in his anger to me, “ You will betray me some day.” It seemed to fairly shout itself in my ears now. Then it shocked me with an appalling sense of shame. Shall I betray him? The question was not possible for me to ask myself. Would a secret love for Clifford be a crime? Must morality consist in making a sacrifice of even thought? Oh, the harsh, cruel irony of our weaknesses that we let go on, instead of putting up the bulwarks against the awful day of destruction!

But there, Clifford is actually in the house. With my hand on my beating heart, I hurry to meet him.

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"You are a lady of fashion, with Paris at your feet," said Clifford, "and it will not be my fault to lay claim to any attentions which would flatter me more than anything else in the world."

"Paris at my feet! Why, Clifford, I have not been to one court function, great ball or even big dinner party since my marriage. Michaelovitch claims that his health does not permit him to go out at night, and I am glad to stay at home quietly to keep peace, for we have never gone to an evening party that he has not come home accusing me of everything on earth. A friend of mine heard him scolding me on the street one night. He called next day, with the curiosity, I believe, to find out whether my husband had murdered me over night. But do not let me go on complaining any more."

While speaking, in nervous confusion I had been playing with a ring, which dropped to the floor. Clifford stooped to pick it up and fell on one knee, our eyes met, his look compelled me; breathless, we did not move, each waited for the other, but neither could speak. The longing in his face unnerved me at last; the lips trembled with the unuttered words that we both felt would be a sacrilege to utter in that house.

"With this ring," and he slipped it on my finger. Released from the spell that bound us with its magic, we laughed together.

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"Clifford, you are silly," I said, glad that we had not committed a folly.

A heavy, shuffling, hurried step over the thick carpet sent a dread horror to my mind. I felt as if petrified to inanimate stone; a new page would be turned in my life, perhaps the last of my daily suffering.

The infuriated voice of my husband startled us both, but Clifford retained a calm that in a measure reassured me, and which was in strong contrast to that of Michaelovitch, on whose neck great whiplashes stood out, his face and bald head dripping with sweat and his eyes glowing glints of red that gave him a fiendish expression awful to behold, as with a terrible oath he cried: "I have found you out, you worse than adventuress! You offered yourself for years in every court of Europe, I found you a nobody, a peasant of your American democracy; you Americans have no blood or breeding, no honor or tradition." The same old story I had heard repeated ever since my marriage.

"Yes, you hunted a fortune for years with your whole soul. You thought you could marry an old man with money and title—and then love where you pleased, but I shall trump your trick. I can't leave you alone for a moment that you do not disgrace me. You, you, oh, bah! away with such vermin!"



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Then, turning to Clifford, he went on: "The purity she brought to me was of itself a bonus knocked down to the highest bidder, that subsequent intrigues might be more glittering. She is an actress, a master hand at deception, expert liar, fool maker, Devil's lackey." Then suddenly he laid a hand on Clifford's shoulder as he shouted, "You puppy, get out of my house instantly."

Clifford loosened himself from a grasp that evidently annoyed him as he quietly said: "You shall hear from me again, sir, when you have your reason, and if you touch this woman to injure her you will have to answer to me." and then strode out of the house.

Doubt of one is the last echoing knell of a love that never was sincere — and doubt when it is wedded to jealousy may bring the disaster it dreads. My husband's doubt would bring me down to hell as he shouted as though to one deaf.

"This is your treatment of me after all that I have done for you," he said as the outer door slammed and we were alone. "There is no use trying to keep a position in society with you, you are a disgrace to me and to my family. Get out of the house, I don't want anything more to do with you."

Without a word I stood listening as to a court sentence. "You had better go to your father, he knows how to manage you. He beats you, that is what you

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deserve. Get out and try your luck, see how it is — see whether I have been kind to you or not."

"Yes, I will go, food and clothes are all you give me, and the world will supply those things to me," I replied.

The longing to be free was the sensation paramount to everything else. I was blind and deaf, but I felt dimly conscious of walking to the front doors and looking up and down the Champs Elysées, when, to my surprise, I saw Clifford hurrying towards me, as if he had come in response to a call. He whistled to a passing cab, walked up the steps, took my hand without saying a word, led me to the cab, where he said, "Get in," and I quietly obeyed, when he ordered the coachman to drive to his apartments. "Oh, Clifford," I cried, "not there, for mercy's sake, not there, think what it will mean for me to encounter that reproach when my husband hears of it."

"Nonsense, who will ever know? You can't go to a hotel without a hat, or cloak, nor to any friend, for then the whole thing would be let loose on the public. Ask yourself right down in your heart what woman there is whom you could trust not to take your skeleton out of the closet and dangle it before your other eager friends! No, trust me. We will drive to my apartment, where I will leave you and return to your husband to intercede for you. Do not worry, Iron-clad, I will see him later. When he comes down he

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will listen. Let me be your guide in this matter. I can give you all and more than you have lost. But, do nothing that I ask simply because I ask it, think only of yourself."

The cab had stopped. Leading me to the door of his apartment, he opened it and with a reassuring smile looked into my troubled face, as he said, "I will return soon," and was gone.

Now, my face to the wall, would even God see my tears? Would I not be lost forever after all this? Even the daily persecution from my husband seemed better than this utter abandonment here. All failure is not wholly ill luck if it is the end of a chain that began in truth, for truth is triumphant. It can only sing the Gloria, while vanity and lies must end in the Dies Irae. Few married women are happy; why should I expect to be? It is a matter of time principally when a married woman enters the Pantheon and places her cypress wreath among the tin funeral hearts that hang so pitifully over the graves, commemorative of the loves that might have been. They wonder why such things must be, as they travel along the dark crypt of an existence without joy. We cling to the material and call it the lasting thing, when we know that the ideal is the bulwark of nature. What to the world appears to be the evanescent really neither fades nor dies — but, what did all this philosophy mean? Was I trying to excuse myself? Was

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I married to an old man to be in love with—but, could Clifford be relied on? Would his love prove to be a lasting devotion? Could a woman come to one man, divorced from another and ask as her right a full confidence that only an honest love can beget? What would my world think?

We live in an age that we boast is the mightiest in right and Christian duty. Speakers have been heard in the pulpits pluming themselves on our great twentieth century. Society dons its most becoming clothes once a week to witness and make avowal of its white respectability. Its voices aloud and in unison the fact of its being "a miserable sinner," but its private assertion is quite to the contrary, because society is king, "the king can do no wrong." It stands in awe at the downfall of one of its votaries and takes heed to cover his track with roses. My mind dwelt with fierce insistence on these subjects.

What if my husband should refuse to take me back? What work could I do? There was only one outlook for me then—I should have to find work of some kind to get the bare necessities of life. What a wide ocean of boundless relief this seemed! It soothed my pulsing senses to quiet dreams of a future where work and liberty should be the stars and stripes in a banner of love and self-respect.

"Lost to the world in which I crave no part,
I sit alone and listen to my heart."



CHAPTER XXIX

*"Then how grace a rose? I know a way,
Leave it rather, must you gather,—
Smell, kiss, wear it, at last throw away."*

WITH all the insistence of a man who has found a new vocation, Clifford watched and waited, but all in vain. Neither the door bell nor the telephone were answered, and they would not let anyone in. Still, Clifford did not lose faith in the hope that his vigilance would be rewarded. He had determined to be the Red Cross Corps to take charge of the pieces when the final explosion came. Hopeless, I feared the worst. Without the presence of an encouraging strength such as Clifford's there would have been nothing to support me, as he returned and told me of his fruitless efforts to see my husband.

We turned to each other as we sat in Clifford's cozy apartment, our eyes met with mutual longing, and the emptiness of his life came upon him with a new meaning. Finally he said: "Never have I realized what a moral prop you have been to me, Ironclad. The hours that we have spent together have been the

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events of my life. You can rouse or soothe me as no other woman has ever done, and with a varied enthusiasm truly wonderful."

"Clifford, hush, this is no time for flattery of that sort, if by chance even a servant knows of my presence here in your apartment the whole story is at an end."

"Nonsense, you forget that I am a lawyer and that not only my friends visit me here, but the servants are, to a certain extent, accustomed to seeing visitors come here to consult me in a professional capacity, just as your servants are used to seeing your friends at your house. What difference whether I go to see you or you come here, just let yourself go and believe in me. I cherish your good name; do not worry, it will all come right. Besides, no one has a better claim to protect you here in a strange land than I, who have known you so long, and I will do it to my last breath."

I passionately longed to be free, to rid my soul of this constant pain of mistrust, which at the beginning had been undeserved. That Clifford, of all men, should be capable of fulfilling the prophecy so often made by Michaelovitch, that I would sometime take the inevitable leap beyond his ironbound restrictions, seemed now to be fulfilled.

When a woman has a jerry-built edifice of white ideals of a man who proposes to destroy her alto-



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gether with the only thing she deems life worth living for, she is to be pitied. The beggar in the street starving, and freezing from the blasts of winter, is a comfortable being in comparison to the woman who suffers from the sirocco of misery that sweeps over the little white liver that she so proudly names her heart.

"Clifford, in justification of whatever happens to us in the future, let us start honestly. You must hear the truth. You must beware of me, I dread to have anyone whom I love care for me. A woman of my nature is a menace to herself as well as to everybody else and must ever beware lest the strong marble pillar of her purified love become striped with black deceit, if not with red crime."

To this he answered: "As long as you will be candid with me, and give me but a vestige of your friendship, you may have no fear of me or of yourself. I can no longer live in the habitual sordidness that formerly seemed to me to be happiness, for, in some way, I feel that you need me. Think of me only as trying to be useful to you."

"With any other man than you, Clifford, our talk would be a desecration of the law that binds me to a man who has tortured me on the rack from the first moment of our marriage. He has been my teacher in hatred, has cast me out into the loveless desert, where so many women eke out an existence.

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For a young woman to be bound to an old man is to put her on the rubbish heap of the ashes of a finer humanity, to be consumed in the great flames of life. While I dreamed of firing the world to its own illumination, I am now as a burnt out brand. You cannot possibly understand me, for yesterday, even, is not to-day, when the literalness of everybody and everything is before me. Soup kitchens, sacred bulls of India, the Golden Calf all have their votaries. Yesterday my sympathies were with the poor man, a miserable ape who knows only how to chatter about clothes and food; but it is with the rich man we ought to sympathize, for his heart is generally a frozen, starved, puny waif without a single friend."

"Ironclad, do you remember your book which you gave me? Here it is, I always carry it with me that I may feel your comradeship more closely, though there are parts of it I know by heart. Everybody says it is an autobiography, and there is so much of you in it. You have heard this before, I know, and I think I have read it a hundred times.

"'The very richest prize that a man can have is a woman who loves him so that she is a very part of him; that their lives become not only a beating of two hearts in unison, but that her very being is entombed within his. The man may bruise her soul till it aches, she only calls it a delight, a love pang.'

"If I was not so infatuated over you before, I was



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cousin-german to it; and because you have been turned out of the house by an irascible old man is no reason why I should love you any the less. Is it such a sin to love you?"

"When women are young they put men on ivory thrones in great gold, and embroidered rooms to loll at their leisure, while they sweat and moan under a burden of love that they bear with a smile, and call it, nothing. If I dared, Clifford, I would say yes to all you ask, but we are neither of us so weak as to yield to only our own desires.

"What can you imagine will be my end now? There is nothing for me but to add my share of wreckage to the flotsam, and jetsam of that seething crowd we see below on the street."

"Oh, Ironclad," said Clifford, impulsively grasping my hand: "leave it all to me. I can raise you higher, or sink you lower; love you or hate you more; run farther, spend more lavishly, pray more humbly and kneel more devotedly at your feet than anyone else in the whole world who ever knew you. I can read you clearly, and when youth's scented pages shall have been turned, I shall love you all the more, always, always, my sweet."

"Not so fast, Clifford, dear," I said. "Only think where we are, and who we are. Ah, if only such love would last, but it cannot, it has never been known to endure. We all crave a personal sympathy,



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or contact if it means homage to us, but I must not, dare not, stop to think of the tortures that were mine when the stress of my disappointment was fresh upon me; it would have ground some women to powder. We are not in pinafores, we are past the age when it is considered dignified to give or take the sympathy that weeps with, or has time to press the hand of a tormented friend.

"At one time my body and soul, past and future, seemed an inadequate sacrifice to the man who loved me and whom I thought I loved. My soul has absorbed my love, and all that I can now feel is hate — hate for the whole world. I hate with the bitterness of a demon in hell."

"As far as I know demons in hell are as useful as angels in heaven. Don't loose your good sense, Ironclad, you are too valuable in this world to everyone who knows you, you will never fall as low as you seem to think it is your duty to simply because for the moment you are unhappy. Come, my girl, cheer up, be natural, you are doing good in the world; just your disposition and good humor would be enough. Dry your tears and make me happy; Ironclad, character is the perfume of the soul, and I know that yours is still sweet and pure."

We were silent. I watched Clifford, who stood still, with his eyes looking as if at something far off, and an empty expression on his face that one in deep

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thought often wears. Finally our eyes met, a wan smile flitted over his features, and a great wave of his thought rolled upon me, and as a pebble of the sea washed down by the compelling tide into the ocean, so my heart yielded itself to his longing wish, and in that renunciation was a marvelous peace past all understanding. As a child trusts its mother, so my confidence reposed in Clifford.

"We are old friends," he said, "and, in whatever condition or circumstances, we will be everything to each other for all time. Trust me, and you shall yet be happy. But I must see your husband and have a talk with him; so I had better make another effort now. You stay here until I return," and he kissed me on the forehead as he left me.

Alone! Just as I always had been when the difficult problems of my life were algebraic equations absolutely impossible of being solved by my stupid brain, that now felt bruised and sore. I had just reached the "thirdly" of my sermon to myself when Clifford entered the room, and the tired expression of his face convinced me that his errand had again been useless. For some reason a feeling of gladness welled up within me, and a picture of freedom, of the untrammelled, happy days of my girlhood, came to my mind with the lovely effect the perfume of a flower has upon one, or a fresh breeze to our hot, tired nerves. Would it be freedom? Freedom at any cost, only

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that — could I dare to hope? Ah, no, the more we seek happiness the less apt we are to find it.

The velvet eyes of Clifford read deep down in my heart all its longings to be free, all its love thirst, all the pain of its past which even a caress or a kind word might have lightened. How his smile brightened a heart which had been dark for so long that it had become numb, and would soon have been callous and lifeless! What peace of mind and comfort to my aching heart had not this short portion of time brought me!

As a girl I had trembled at my fears and desires; after marriage, when the many secrets of human nature were revealed to me, and my misery was dragging me ever nearer to the precipice, I prayed to be freed from the intuitions of evil that all temperamental women must accept; but God knows I never wanted to feel the regret of a coquette, or the unfathomable depths of remorse that my training would assuredly endow me with, in case this bitter trial should come to me.

Clifford, as usual, had read my thoughts and his face wore a mingled expression of love and amusement, not without pity and womanly tenderness, as he said:

“Your learned philosophy and pet religious sentiments won't weigh against your happiness, dear. ‘Ask and ye shall receive,’ is indeed true. If you

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want to be happy let me take you to myself; don't harangue me or struggle against me; just put your arms about my neck, love, and trust me; lean your heart on mine. We have been tried friends for years; can't we be lovers, too? Say with that sweet, fresh, mouth of yours against my lips, 'I love you,' then always stay with me, always love me; but, if you can't swear eternal love, say the word to an eternal friendship, for no one shall ever harm you as long as I have strength to defend you."

His manner was so gentle, his strong manly arms thrilled me beyond power of resistance as they drew me to him, while his heart vibrated its intense pulsing love to mine, and in a rhythmic measure they beat together, as our lips were united in a long, lingering kiss.

"Ah, Clifford, no, we must not—you will think less of me than ever; there will be no excuse that we can offer. If two wild madcaps go over a precipice on purpose, who have they to blame? What recompense is there? 'Whom God hath joined together,' you know, 'let no man put asunder'; but how absurd that is! How many men and women do you suppose are joined by God, or can give a reason for their marriage? Many women divorce one man after another to keep on repeating the wedding ceremony with exactly the same result. Many divorced women marry again and proclaim themselves happy

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out of pride; their egotism will not acknowledge the naked facts. The crime of it all is our ignorance.

"The poor have less trouble because they work at useful employments. They don't suppress the functions which they were put on earth to perform and accentuate and over-educate others that were never meant to be. Instead of reading Schopenhauer they spade the garden; instead of longing for a Sheffield set of silver plate they make the baby a new dress. There is not the rage and rivalry after display, or craze for more money than they can spend. This thirst and greed for money is destroying us all.

"Besides all the rest of it, there is the constant friction in the household about money that separates so many people from a happiness that otherwise they would bestow on one another."

"Kate, you have always had pure motives, and have been patient, kind and generous, as no woman ever could have been who was not exactly like you. Have no regrets, for you have done all that could have been done. Staunch and brave, you stood like a soldier, without flinching. You are made of the stuff that conquerors are made of, but there is the other side of you, which I love most, that I pray to and yield to. Why should you consider it necessary to bow to a domination that in your innermost soul you despise more than you are willing to tell, just because you are married?" Here he lowered his voice

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as he drew nearer to whisper in my ear—"Is it money?"

Why would all the world throw that poisoned shaft at my beleaguered soul? Just because, I suppose, any sore on the body is the vulnerable spot for all hurt or accident. "Why," they all asked, "had I, when taking to myself a husband and home, refused the many young men who were known to be my cast-off lovers, to fasten in marriage to a man that to a casual observer made the action a tragedy, except that his social position and supposed wealth had outweighed their less exalted stations?" Retribution, that means a payment of coin in kind, was the only answer that could be echoed back from questions like these.

"Yes, Clifford," I said, as my tired head sought repose on the back of the luxurious divan that seemed a refuge and a shelter, "life has many difficult problems for any woman, but those of the wife are tiresomely numerous. Here, amid fine peaceful surroundings, things look differently. Like throwing off a heavy load on a hot day, so it seems pleasant to be in this tranquillity where pure delight might be within easy reach. People talk of mother-love, as if it was on a plane by itself, and no other virtue could equal it in the training of a child. We give it the highest place simply because it is the oldest institution in the world and we cannot afford to lessen the value of

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an established belief old as mankind itself. While a mother's love is the sweetest boon to a girl that heaven can send her it may not be the real good to her that something else may be, partly because no child can appreciate what that love can be, for never can the depth and strength of such an ocean be sounded until one has themselves sailed on it. A mother, because of her mother-passion, may be blind, or her pride in her offspring such that she does not see that which it were best that she should. All love is more or less brutal. Love is never unalloyed, even a mother frequently has her preferences among several children, but love is as water compared to that rock called duty. Duty, did ever any other word exist that meant so much if it has a place in one's heart. If we all listened to the call of duty, what a heaven this earth would be.

"Clifford, my duty is to my husband. Will you not try once more to see him and have a talk with him? In all probability he will not see you or believe you; he will likely try your patience with insults, but you are always a hero to your friends, who think that anything is possible to you. Go, dear old Clifford, I will wait for you here."

CHAPTER XXX

*"I wish you were dead, my dear,
I would give you, had I to give,
Some death too bitter to fear,
It is better to die than to live."*

IN a manner that one unaccustomed to such things can never know, the rich warm colors, the pictures, comfort and sumptuous fittings of the apartment appealed to me, to whom for so long they had been denied, for:

*"Maidens like moths are ever caught by glare,
And Mammon wins his way where Seraphs might
despair."*

Clifford remained but a short time away. He sat down on the divan beside me and took my hand while he told me that, although he had been unable to gain an entrance, he was conscious that there was something unusual going on, that the automobile of a prominent physician stood before the hotel and there seemed to be a suppressed excitement about the house.

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He had watched for a time to see if he could gain any information, but not being able to find out anything, he had returned to me, with the intention of making still another effort later on.

"Oh, Ironclad, a girl like you ought to have everything she wants, go where she pleases, but above all she ought to have love. You have not been a good enough diplomat. The wife of Michaelovitch Romanoff would need the commercial spirit and plenty of tact. You had better let me plan for you now, for I feel that he has taken his tack to sea, and that he does not intend to change. He has decided everything for you, never humored you; and, my dear, no one would blame you for getting elsewhere what you could not get at home. At any rate, you need a friend who understands the situation and can guide you. Let me decide this for you, let me give you some solace. All of us have to cross the Styx some day or other. I believe you will reach Paradise yet; if you have fallen into Hell it is more from the weight of other's sins than your own."

"Clifford, I appreciate your sweet sympathy but I dare not accept it. Goodness entirely unnerves me. Blame me, tell me it is all my fault, then it will be easy for me to brace and endure. Asmodeus, the demon of matrimonial unhappiness, the demon of vanity and dress, has been invoked by me and now I am paying his price. We all have to pay, sooner

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or later, the bitter cost for being separated from a desire for truth."

"Oh, don't get to preaching, my girl. We can't any of us give up the tax demanded by the gods of humanity, nor say that all joy may be any man's lot for all time. 'Let us make the most of what we yet may spend' or listen to old Omar: 'Take the cash and let the credit go.' Let each moment bring you its happiness, don't put off acquiring it till every promissory note of youth has been refused at Nature's great clearing house."

What could the commotion Clifford thought he perceived about our house mean? I had sat brooding alone so long that my mind was ready to grasp at any dark foreboding.

"Kate, for the love of God, of what are you thinking? Oh, Kate, what are you thinking of doing?" and he sprang to me and grasped both my wrists in a grip that nothing but his own will could have removed. "You surely would never do anything desperate?"

"Yes, that." My voice was hoarse, even my strong effort to be natural was unavailing, my whole being was betraying me. If only I could assume my usual bearing, go out in the darkness, walk to the house cool and prepared, with a dagger, yes, a dagger sharp and small, easily held in the hand, like that in Clifford's writing desk, for there must be no mistake

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about it, no noise, no words, no terrible threats, just that; then—perhaps, the penitentiary for life. What matter, nothing could be worse than this sort of freedom, to be out in the world but to have your heart and soul locked in a dark murderous wall of intention, as mine had been so long—to end these hysterical days of self-pity under the lash of a master whose soul was money, whose hand and heart were wrapped in money and could not see anything else, while all my tense nature and strong passions were heated into one amalgamated horrid hate, a hate that would hiss itself into more hate, through seething sibilant words, too horrible to utter but beyond holding under one's breath.—Revenge! What a sweet word that became, how good it was to roll it under one's tongue and cast one's hope upon it! To look upon the destruction of him and all that was his, then to turn one's feet in the way of love, to found a home, to bear children sacred to that love, to encourage all the good, the best impulses that were rotting away in this morass of marriage, where the hatred and dread of this miser should no more come upon me as it had, and, I felt, would again. Yes, to live to be good again, away from the deceit, the lies, the broils and indecencies my life had been shadowed with for the past few years.

“Kate, you have played the game thus far with more skill than anyone would ever have been willing

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to grant you; don't play foul now that things are all your way. What do you want? Nothing in the world so much as your freedom and love." And Clifford looked away, subjoining the principal idea to my mind by a process of telepathy rather than the vulgar mode of spoken word, to the effect that freedom gained would practically mean our mutual possession of each other. We both understood, our hearts were confessing this.

"No," I murmured, "I am recovered, I will not add a bloody crime to my burden; my remorse would be more than I could bear."

"What is that noise as if someone opened a door? There are silk petticoats rustling."

Before the words were said Clifford was confronted by the problem of his life, for he stood between the woman who craved him for herself and the woman that he loved. It was Nina, who had really been on Clifford's track for years, but not being able to secure his attention in return, had found the closest proximity to him would be to place her Penates on Larnard's mantel shelf, where, at least, they would be blessed by his grudging, patronizing acquaintance.

"I beg pardon, I did not know you were with a lady."

The malicious intonation with which this was uttered did not escape my distracted senses. The shrill laughter that nothing had elicited rather sur-

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prised me. Nina detected intrigue, which she gloated over at the same time that it incensed her. A society woman entrapped, was her thought, and with the scorn that such women betray for the white lamb that strays outside the fold, she gave me a look of withering contempt.

"So this is what Clifford came to Paris for, you, my rival, was the magnet that drew him," she said with sneering politeness. "A vanquished woman takes comfort in the fact that her rival is up to the mark —" and Nina surveyed me with not an unalloyed scrutiny.

"No, indeed, no woman need claim me as a rival, for I am married. Mr. Bennet and my husband are old friends and I am here entirely on a business errand."

"Beg pardon, I never judge another woman, but zealously guard my own reputation from the toils of society women, for they think they have a special license granted them by Providence to butcher everyone else, and there are some things sacred to me, one of which is my reputation."

Nina, who was more clever than most women of her kind, had read in an instant what would be most taunting to her common enemy, another woman.

"We women have our peccadillos, but I would not have disturbed this tête-à-tête had I known of it, only, we all come to Clifford if we want anything or anybody, and Lar is such a slippery eel no one can pin

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him down to any consistent constancy, and to-night I was at the last knot of my string. I would have trusted you, Clifford, to the end of your days — but these society women are great drains upon men, and they do not consider us even as beggars at Lazarus' door, we take the crumbs, but give — well, no matter. But I hear that Lar is really married to —”

“Nina, please come into the other room with me,” broke in Clifford, who had been getting impatient beyond control as Nina became so insufferably talkative, not so much angry as uncontrollably excited.

“I do not choose to,” she replied, imitating a pout, as she took a newspaper off the table and leaned gracefully against one corner of its heavy carving, without looking up, but trembling from head to foot, as she noticed that she was making a coup of some kind, and that she unmistakably had the upper hand.

There are counterparts to animals in human beings. Nina was like nothing else than an unbroken filly that if ridden with a gag bit would fling you a cropper. She pursued her love affairs with all the impetuosity of an ardent nature, and all the carelessness of inconsistency. She was surer of subduing Clifford now by the magic of her pride than she had ever been before.

He read the meaning of her triumphant look at a glance. Nina meant that by my degradation his estimate of her would be lifted. She knew his admira-

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tion for a good woman, as he termed the inaccessible woman who would not yield to him. She had failed in all her efforts to secure his love; he had thrown her off as he would an old glove.

" 'Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned! ' " she hummed to an inconsequential tune, in a tone that hinted at another scene upon which the curtain had been rung down, supposedly forever.

" Madame and I are evidently booked for the same race. What are you going to do about it, jockey, dearie? " she interrogated with polite irony.

Here the bell rang and jumping up she exclaimed:

" That must be Lar, for I arranged with him to meet me here, as he is getting impertinent now and does as he pleases. "

" You might have had the grace to go elsewhere with your Lar for an interview, you will excuse me if I say you cannot stay here, because I have some business with this lady, " he said, with a violent gesture, but at the same moment Larnard rushed in, saying, before he had greeted us:

" Now, my girl, you want to make it short and to the point, I think this is rather a forced deal. "

" Don't get fluffy, my boy, you will have plenty of time, so don't waste your breath. "

" Come, let us get out of this and don't annoy decent people with our quarreling. "

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"If I were a man I would hammer your face till you would pass your own house. I have endured your brutalities till I am heartily tired of them. You and your whole set are the rottenest gang I ever came across, and I did not live among the lilies before I met you, either."

"It is hardly necessary for you to criticise the women of my set," said Larnard, "please to confine your perorations to something you know about — men, for instance."

"Yes, you are so particular about your women." Then, turning to Clifford, she said: "Do you intend to give this lady the facts regarding this marriage that you so soon will publish to the world, with a woman who cannot claim one vestige of your heart? Can you efface the past? Will you be able to hide the facts of it from her?" asked Nina, with an indescribable flash of her eyes. "You, you villain," she gasped between a choke and a sob, "you, who have taken from me all the best of my life —" then, seeing the unwisdom of so unequal an attack, she changed her tactics and coming up to Larnard said, "Lar, dear, think of it! If I should drop out of your life it would be to perdition. The gulf between lovers is so fearfully wide. Come to my rooms, Lar, and let us talk it over. Oh, Lar!"

Convulsively she covered her face with her hands. A woman's sobs are her strongest argument. Some

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women learn this early and conjure up briny persuasion at will, before which court and jury decide for the plaintiff.

Larnard put his arm about Nina tenderly. He was descended from a race noted in the age of knight errantry for their heroism and gallantry. Nina was courtesan at heart. She had made her lover's disposition and traits of character a scientific study to the end that she might control him through his own ideas; appealing to his honor and loyalty, she had now played trumps and won the game. She placed her hand gently on his arm, saying: "Lar, let us go," and putting her lips close to his, as she looked into his eyes with a magnetism he apparently could not resist, she murmured: "Not one man in a hundred would feel that a weak, helpless woman was worth gunpowder to blow her up, but such men as you are above the great mass. No other man shall ever take your place with me."

"You have been a good girl to me, Nina; come, let us go. Let us go to your rooms and talk it over."

Nina knew this was no time for making a scene or appealing to him, but a look in her eyes said she had a view to further concessions. She gave him her hand, overlaid with jewels, smiled archly, pouted her wet baby lips for a kiss. It looked as though she had weighed the new bride's best bower anchor on the ship that was to sail Larnard over the tempestuous sea

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of life from out the placid moorings of bachelorhood to the dangerous reef called marriage.

Then, turning to me with her most gracious manner, she said: "Let me be the first to congratulate you on the regaining of your freedom, even though through so unfortunate a climax, and assure you that when I planned with Lar to meet him here I had no idea that we would interrupt any such a tête-à-tête. I only heard the news as I dropped into the Consulate office on my way here, as it was telephoned to a newspaper, but even then I had no idea that our old Clifford was the one who had caused all the trouble. May you live long to enjoy the money that from all accounts you have more than earned. Or, as you said awhile ago that you were here entirely on business, perhaps Clifford is your legal adviser to assist you in the management of the vast fortune you will doubtless come into as the widow of the distinguished diplomat, Michaelovitch Romanoff."

While saying this she had been putting on her gloves, and, as Larnard showed evident signs of impatience to go, they hurriedly left the room.

"Widow," "Consulate," what did it mean? "Newspaper," "telephone"? I stood stunned, but Clifford had been quick to realize and understand it all and he now turned to me saying, "Kate, what she said explains the excitement I saw last time I went to the hotel. Stay here while I go again and try and



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find out if this news that Nina has hinted at is true. My dear, I must leave you alone, but do not worry, just be satisfied to let me bear your burdens for you in the future, whatever they may be."

Left alone in an atmosphere permeated with Nina's perfume, that reminded me of her sneering expression as she looked at me over her shoulder when for an imperceptible moment she hesitated, as if fixed by interest hard to overcome, I sat and brooded over my position. Remorse is not a fit companion for an unhappy woman. The contempt, or rather the idea Nina wished to voice of her own superiority over one who could not know to what length her false step might lead, suddenly seized me with an icy grip that, like a death's hand, shook me till my teeth chattered. Was I afraid? Of what? Time, time present or future, what did any of them matter?

I chose to be good for the world's ridicule. A voluntary being I had eliminated the stars to receive the darkness. God sometimes fills in such blanks, but with such as I surely it would be folly to pray, to put God to the test. God and the Devil often seem to have their limitations. All power while ruling must in turn be ruled. Why do Christians so often use the argument that a jealous God is punishing them for their sins? This that I suffered was what they meant. But why suffer? What is moral suffering, or remorse? A state of mind that comes from a

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point of view. There is nothing wrong in itself, but a friend or neighbor withholds his encomiums because our behavior does not accord with his. Moral codes are largely matters of environment or training. Could even the power of God perform the miracle of changing present conditions for my asking him? What would be such a worm as I when the present moment was but the preparation of hundreds of years of history or the effect of at least a thousand years of ancestry, just as one drop of water contains all the elements of the Universe?

Recognizing our divinity relegates us to the general machinery of a set of laws that it is our duty, if not our mission, to learn and to follow.

Even if saved by invisible hands now it would be only that my future destruction might be more awful. My conscience would condemn me. Why could I not have solved the first problem of my life? Always my own master, I now felt like a whipped dog crouching at the feet of cruel circumstances.

Had Nina spoken the truth? Was my husband really dead? What could I do for a living? While my friends called me talented, what would be the market value of any of my talents? What income would the exercise of any of my accomplishments bring? None of my church friends would help me, for they had the very poor to look after and the rich to cater to. They naturally would condemn me,

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to make me feel the chastisement of a jealous God, who has his own methods to bring a sinner back to the fold. Then for social reasons they would not dare to recognize me now. No, in every sense I must be my own saviour, rule my own destiny and not care for what they said.

In my secret soul I knew that never would it be possible to reckon without the one overpowering element in it all, man. No convent, even, would be entirely a protection. Place or time, it was all the same. The many glittering generalities that my will had thrown around my education had not acquired a protecting ægis from the everlasting Male — with hot blood in his veins, heart on fire with passion and stung by a Tyche-like desire to divine my charm for him. There never had been a cessation, why should there be now? Would age, gray hair or loss of that exuberance so attractive in youth deter the arduous pursuit of a woman who bore the hall-marks by which she was invariably known. I seemed to myself to be a white-robed virgin instead of the red petticoated being who, with some modifications, we paint as the modern Jezebel. The best thing for me would be to turn Sister of Charity; do helpful things, spend the days in nursing the sick, reading to the blind; bringing brightness to those who had none in their lives; root out the selfishness, offer my whole being to the light that for years had failed, kill the



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old nature that a new one might be born again, live for others.

The very wealth of all things spiritual or worldly would then flow in beyond all my expectations; not that this wealth would come from seeking it, but only by giving it to others, when the long dark days would be filled with a joy not too brief.

In my heart I forgave all my enemies. A soothing rest crept over my shivering, tired body, the racked mind gradually succumbed to this balm that my own eased conscience put upon it. The world seemed a good place. My perfect health asserted itself in an overpowering drowsiness. My eyelids fell — I must sleep — sleep — sleep.

CHAPTER XXXI

*"Why must I keep from Love's embrace
Because of shame?
Why turn aside my hated face,
Am I to blame?"*

*That all the life within me cries
For love, and lips that kiss with sighs,
Till heart unites with heart, and dies,
Am I to blame?"*

IT was dawn. Clifford had evidently returned and covered me with a Navajo and gone out again. The burden of the night seemed to be consumed with its darkness. The sun, in a fiery chariot of joyous, opalescent red and gold of a new day touched the city with its cheering light. As I looked out into the splendor of the morning I said to myself that now my life should be given to Fate to paint — how would the colors be chosen? Kneeling on the divan and looking at the sky, my heart sent up a prayer as naturally as a rose will give out its perfume. To live truthfully, and from this time forward to think of the happiness of others more and not be so self-

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centered; not to waste time idly in society but help those who needed aid. Yet, the thought came to my mind, in spite of myself, that all too soon I might be in need of the help that I so eagerly dreamed it might be in my power to give to others. The future promised — what?

I turned round to find that Clifford had stood looking at me all the time. He laid a paper down on the table while he took both my hands, but my eyes had caught sight of the words, in unusually large headlines:

SCANDAL IN HIGH LIFE HOME INVADED

Domestic troubles in the family of Michaelovitch Romanoff end in the death of that distinguished Russian diplomat. Grief at seeing his American wife enter a cab with a former lover, now in Paris, produces a stroke of apoplexy, causing almost instant death.

"Clifford!" was all I could utter. I must have reached the limit of degradation, for while standing there, white to the lips, looking at Clifford grim and silent, I yet felt a certain pleasure in this announcement. It was the knife that cut the Gordian knot. This meant absolute freedom. What greater gift could the world or Heaven grant?

"I could not gain an entrance to the house," said

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Clifford, "but learned that when you left the house Michaelovitch had watched you from the window and saw me put you into the cab, which so added to the excitement he was already in that it brought on a stroke of apoplexy, and that the servant, hearing a fall, came into the room and found him lying on the floor. He immediately called up a doctor, but his efforts were of no avail. When everything was over the servant called up the consulate officials and advised them of the fact of his death, giving them a version as to the cause of his excitement. This evidently was the message that Nina overheard when she was in the consulate office, and they told me there that she came to inquire for your address.

"I came back last night to tell you this but found you asleep and had not the heart to awaken you, for I knew you would need all your strength to go through the trials that must await you to-day, and for many days to come, so I covered you and went to the apartment I have taken for myself for the present, in a hotel which is so near here that I can be with you at any time in a few minutes. But, come, let us have breakfast."

Then taking both my hands in his, he said, "Kate, I want to fight this battle for you, and if possible secure justice for you. I am confident that I can."

How shall I describe the days that passed, their misery, and the sustaining comfort that Clifford, with

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his constant and thoughtful attentions, was to me! I was not permitted to enter the house where my husband's body lay awaiting the last sacred rites of the Greek Church, which I only attended as one of the gaping throng. I was not even allowed to pack my own clothes and jewels, and my maid was permitted to give me only such jewels as I had before my marriage. I was a stranger in a strange land with no power at my command, while I had to contend with one who had all the influence of the Russian consulate. But, in spite of all this, after months of hard and bitter struggling, Clifford managed to secure for me an independence. At last it was settled, I was a free human being again, without even the black pall of a law suit hanging over my head. What I had secured from my husband's vast fortune was a bare pittance, but what cared I for his money? What was that beside the joy of my freedom and the glorious fact that Clifford had compelled the world to acknowledge my rights as the honorable wife of the dead diplomat!

This long and bitter contest had drained even my strong constitution. The day the last legal seal was placed upon the long sheets of paper it seemed to me I was but a wreck of my former self, and was only too glad to accept the mandate of my physician that I take a protracted sea trip.

I had been too depressed in spirit and too listless

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of late to even pay special attention to the fact that Clifford had recently bought a yacht and was having it put in commission. I was tired of Paris and felt that now any place would be more acceptable to me after this tragedy; and as I sat in my apartment one afternoon, trying to decide where to go, in a world that was now bereft of those whom I loved the most, a world empty of everything save the joy of the long comforting visits that Clifford made to me daily. How had life been bereft of all ambition, all interest — If only a little child's fingers could bind up the withered bruised thing I used to call my heart — that would replace all the glitter that formerly seemed necessary to a loveless career — as I had grown now to know that a woman's usefulness is in her household.

"Dear Old Ironclad, there is but one course left for you to take. It may be difficult for you to decide but the yacht casts her mooring from Cherbourg to-morrow, if you will go put your hand in mine for answer."

I walked to the window and looked out — a girl in a shirt-waist, with a lunch basket, passed. I stared at Clifford. There was a knock at the door, and to Clifford's prompt call of "Come in," the door opened and a serving man in holiday attire appeared.

"Excuse me, sir, but the word is going round among the crew that you wish to sail to-morrow, and the captain says as how, begging your pardon, sir, he

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would like to know. He has telephoned to-day over the wire to the lady he wants to marry, and she wired back as the clergyman of her church is going away on his vacation day after to-morrow, and the captain wants to know, sir, could you wait until day after to-morrow to sail and let him go and get married."

"Tell the captain that we shall sail after he is married and that this lady will give him orders from now, henceforth, and as long as we sail life's seas together, for she has consented to be first mate —

"Hawkes, congratulate us,— for we sail to-morrow on the *Idalia* with a new passenger — my wife —

"We will cruise the Mediterranean. Contrary to all sailing rules tell Captain Riggs to take his bride with him.

"Is that according to the book, Kate? — if so put it there!" and Clifford held out his large, square palm, into which I placed my hand, confident that no harm should come to me now.

The man bowed himself out of the door with a glad smile, too eager to spread the good news of Clifford's final decision to overthrow his former proud boasts that no woman would ever make him declare himself to that foolhardy mission of spending a lifetime in pleasing a woman.

At last alone — free! Clifford clasped me to him in an embrace that has never let me fall from its sheltering protection — and from without the narrow



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circle of his manly, strong arms I see great vistas of large worlds of increasing usefulness, and unutterably happy days full of desire to shed about me a part, at least, of the sunshine that a woman can, who has fulfilled her highest mission in heaven, or earth, that of happy wife, and mother.

THE END















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